

THE HOUSE WITH A BAD NAME

TERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

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The House With a Bad Name



THE HOUSE WITH A BAD NAME

BY
PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

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THE HOUSE WITH A BAD NAME

CHAPTER 1

NO. 6 CINNAMON STREET

THERE was a touch of the grand about No. 6 Cinnamon Street—a touch of the grand and the mysterious. There was something about it to make you feel as you might feel, say, if you saw a once fine gentleman who had committed a murder, and had been to prison, and who still had distinguished manners and tried to smile it down, but was old and shaky and distrusted—an old gentleman who, notwithstanding all that, still wore a flower in the lapel of his coat.

Cinnamon Street itself was something like that. It was one of the oldest streets in New York—far downtown on the lower West Side. Once it had been the main street of a village on the outskirts of New York, and all sorts of fashionable people had lived there. Now it was changed.

The big city had swallowed it up. And hardly any one lived there any more except longshoremen and Italian

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grocery-keepers—people like that. Recently, moreover, a broad new avenue had been cut through this part of town, paved with granite and lined almost instantly with big square factories and warehouses. This alone had wiped out about half a mile of the old residences which once were the main feature of Cinnamon Street, while the other end of the street had been condemned and closed altogether.

But No. 6 remained intact.

And there were trees in Cinnamon Street to either side of No. 6, and also a certain air. So that to have stumbled upon it, especially in this part of town, would have been like, say, finding a lace handkerchief in a hardware-shop.

No. 6 must have been built there while the street was still fashionable. It was so old that you could have imagined General Washington, for example, dropping in there on his way home from church. The church was next door—a little old chapel in a little old graveyard, both closed and long since abandoned.

Perhaps it was the presence of this graveyard that helped to give No. 6 its bad name. Old Goodenough, who was a driver for Pliny's, a livery-stable down the street, often paused on his way home, especially when he was in his cups, and he was generally like that, and recite a bit of weird verse. Every time that Goodenough ran across a piece of poetry about ghosts and things he would commit it to memory. He had the memory of a genius when it came to haunts and pale brides coming back. Old Goodenough would look across the street at No. 6

No. 6 Cinnamon Street

standing there next to the graveyard, and he would quote:

“No one walks there now;
Except in the white moonlight
The white ghosts walk in a row,
If you could see it, an awful sight.”

No. 6 was built of brick. It had green blinds which were almost always closed. And it was all of three stories high, not counting the sunken basement and the dormer-windowed attic—a noble house—noble still despite all those transformations that had taken place in the neighborhood.

And the people who lived in the house were noble, too—noble so far as wealth and tradition were concerned. You could tell this just by looking at them, no matter what might have been said. They had a look of grandeur about them, just as the old house had, whatever the wild, dark stories afloat concerning them.

You would have had a chance to see them, especially when the weather was fine; for then, as likely as not, old Goodenough would come driving up to No. 6 in a rattly old victoria—which in itself was a signal for every one to stand and stare.

Then the door of No. 6 would open and a little old man would come nimbly down the steps. He was always dressed in black, always immaculate—high, white collar, open at the front, a flat, white Ascot tie, his snowy white hair brushed forward over his ears. He must have been seventy at least; but spry, as if the greatness

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of the occasion inspired him to extra effort. The butler he was. More about him later. And he would take up his station at the side of the victoria, every line and glint of him bespeaking servility and adoration.

Nor would this attitude of his be without reason; nor, for the matter of that, the proud way in which Goodenough—he on the driver's seat—would draw himself up and try to look like a real coachman, in spite of his face of a vinous old philosopher, and his saggy round back. Reason enough was there, also, that every one should stand and stare—Tony Zamboni, who ran the corner grocery, and Mrs. Zamboni, and all the little Zambonis, and such truckmen, loafers, and strangers as happened to be about.

Among these latter, there happened to be an artist and an architect one day—both of them young—just out browsing around the city, seeing what they could see; and they had come upon Cinnamon Street quite by accident, and had been charmed by it, especially by No. 6. They had been standing just across the street, admiring its delicate tints and fine old colonial lines. Then, there came old Goodenough driving up with his ramshackle equipage.

“By Jove!” said the architect. “Isn’t that great, Hal? Isn’t that wonderful? The old house was just about perfect as it was—with that colonial doorway and its knocker and everything, and now to have a real old-fashioned victoria come driving up. Jove! It makes me feel as if we were living a century ago.”

No. 6 Cinnamon Street

"Yes," said Hal; "and it'll be just like New York for some cursed fat banker to come out and spoil it all."

But they stood there and stared in silence as the old butler appeared and came down the steps and took up his position expectantly. He was so obviously the old butler—and yet with a face to remind one of the late Sir Henry Irving. His appearance alone would have been enough to warn the strangers that this was no ordinary spectacle, had such a warning been needed—not ordinary for New York, at any rate. And the deduction would have been correct.

After a brief interval, a gentleman appeared at the top of the tall stoop—not just a mere ordinary man; a gentleman! This gentleman was, say, somewhere around sixty; he was very handsome, very distinguished, stately and tall and gray. His gray hair was long and wavy. He was dressed in gray—carried a gray high hat in his hand, wore a gray frock coat, gray spats. A striking figure, albeit a little old-fashioned. Even so it was his face that absorbed most of the attention; straight-featured and bold, yet with a dwelling tragedy in the eyes; something that lurked there and peered out, like a strange, lost animal in the depths of a dark room.

So much for him; because, a moment or so later, the girl appeared; and then there would be no attention for any one else much except for her.

"Gad!" whispered Hal.

The young architect that was with him spake no word at all. He merely held his breath. Perhaps his heart stopped beating. That sort of thing does happen when

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fate reaches out and touches some one with her invisible finger.

The gentleman had offered the girl his hand, was assisting her down the stoop with a real, old-fashioned courtesy.

The girl was possibly twenty. She had a delicate face. Even so, it was boldly contoured also, just as the man's face was. She was no weakling. There was a suppressed fire about her. But also a demureness. The demureness was chiefly in her eyes, which were large and dark blue. But her coloring was so fair that her eyes appeared really darker than they were. So it was with her eyelashes and her eyebrows, which were very fine. She was a golden blonde. Her hair was clustered in a lot of short curls on either side of her face, as if the gold of them had been beaten to a foam.

The most remarkable thing about her, though, was her clothing. Very beautiful clothing it was—white silk, old lace, ruffles; all this just sufficiently touched up with a hint of pastel-shades here and there to supply a sort of opalescent sheen. But the style!—a style that must have been out of date at the time the wearer herself was born.

Nothing grotesque about it. The toque was becoming. So was the tight little bodice over her modest bosom, and the long, full skirt. Of the finest material, too, her outfit must have cost a pretty sum. But it was all very touching.

The girl may have been conscious of this. Maybe this accounted for something of that suppressed fire about

No. 6 Cinnamon Street

her. But she gave no other sign. She showed plainly enough how she loved and respected the man in gray—showed it in every gesture and inclination of her graceful shape as she descended the steps and entered the waiting carriage.

CHAPTER II

GLAMOUR

AND this," breathed the artist, Hal, "in noisy, up-to-date New York."

Still the architect was silent. Silence became him, anyway—a meditative, thoughtful youth, with a suggestion of romance and poetry about him. He stirred somewhat as a man might have stirred in his sleep. He merely sighed.

"A great model, Buck, for a Dolly Madison," Hal developed.

Buck—his full name was Buckhannon—was seeing other pictures; so one would have said from the expression in his dark eyes. It was an expression that was both avid and reverent; the look of a man who sees holy visions, dimly, not to be talked too much of.

The girl and her escort by this time had entered the carriage as great people should, without paying too much attention to the old servant standing there. No, the girl was seen to give him a half smile, with a short intake of her breath, as she settled back on the plum-colored cushions of Goodenough's old victoria. The gentleman had taken his place at her side. Goodenough, having held his whip aloft while this was under way, now touched

his roan with the tip of his lash. The butler faded up the stoop and disappeared.

"A gift from God!" Buckhannon gasped, speaking softly and more as a man would who spoke to himself. "Do you remember," said he, "that thing Lafcadio Hearn says somewhere about there being—something ghostly in all great art?"

Just back of where they stood and almost opposite to No. 6 there was a small drugstore with a soda-fountain.

"Let's go in and get a drink," said Hal.

The customers had seated themselves at the sticky marble-counter near the street door, where they could still command a view of No. 6. A hush had fallen. The old house stood on its bank of the now empty street as one might stand on the bank of a mysterious stream and watch the place where something precious had disappeared. The silence was unbroken as the druggist came forward. He must have been wearing slippers. He bowed his head a little and himself looked across at No. 6 as if he were expecting to see something surprising and not very respectable over there.

Hal and his friend ordered their drinks.

The druggist served them with an air of knowing just what chemicals the red stuff was made of and what it would do to them. He wiped the marble with a soiled rag. And there he was again letting his eyes stray to the house across the street.

"That's a fine old house," said Hal.

The druggist shook his head. He wasn't too sure.

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But he swallowed the words he would have spoken as he might have swallowed a handful of pills.

"Who are those folks who live over there?" asked Hal.

The druggist lingered, as if against his will. He got out something inarticulate. He made his slippered escape. In the silence that followed they could hear him making the small, mysterious noises of his craft back of the prescription-counter.

"Did you notice how he appeared to be frightened?" asked Hal. "From the way he acted you would have thought that the old house over there had a curse on it."

Buckhannon smiled, but he did not speak. Still, there was a look on his face that also suggested some uncanny reflection—something that he had alluded to when quoting that remark of Lafcadio Hearn—that thing about there being something ghostly in all great art. Wasn't it because there was also something ghostly in life itself—something of the old fairy tale, of the knight or the princess held prisoner by enchantment?

But Hal had rapped on the marble with the edge of a coin. At that the druggist came slinking from his retreat again, somewhat as an unwilling earthworm might respond to the tap of a robin.

"How much do I owe you?" the artist asked.

"Ten cents," the druggist whispered furtively.

Having thus caught him so that he could not get away, the youth cheerfully continued his quest for information.

"Who'd you say it was who lived in the brick house across the street?"

The druggist wriggled the end of his nose and cleared his throat. He made an effort.

"That's the old Tyrone house," he volunteered.

And his expression was such that it led Hal to his next question.

"Why? What's the matter with it?"

The druggist appeared to be uneasy. He didn't want to say. "Would you gentlemen like anything else?" he inquired.

"Tyrone!" breathed Buckhannon, as if the name had a particular charm for him.

"Mr. Tyrone and Miss Tyrone," Hal developed pleasantly.

"Maybe," said the druggist with another tremendous effort, "it was his wife!"

Buckhannon gave a start.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"His wife," whispered the druggist, grinning. "It's her, all right. She's just showed up again."

"How do you mean—just showed up again?"

The druggist was frightened, but he had committed himself. He had to go on. He had the air of a man who tells a tragic joke.

"Everybody," he said, "*thought she was dead.*"

"Oh, I see," said Hal. "You mean that she was in the hospital or something. She's been sick."

But he knew well enough that that wasn't what the druggist had meant. The druggist hadn't said it that way. Nor was Buckhannon deceived.

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"Explain yourself," said Buckhannon, with sudden vehemence.

"I'm merely telling you what they say," the druggist affirmed, beginning to defend himself. "Some mighty queer things happen in a town like this. It may be her or it may not be. It's none of my business. They never came in here to buy anything they hadn't a right to."

"Why?" Hal asked casually, as he winked at Buckhannon. "Were they ever accused of poisoning any one?"

"I don't believe in talking about such things," said the druggist. "It isn't professional."

"Look here," said Hal. "You can trust us. Can't he, Buck? A little while ago you said that everybody thought that this girl we saw coming out of the house was dead——"

"I didn't say anything against them," the druggist affirmed. "They're perfectly all right, so far as I know. It's a good many years now since we saw them bringing the coffin out."

"Whose coffin!"

The druggist swallowed another handful of vocal pills. But there was an insistence in the way the others waited.

"I've got a full line of cigars," said the druggist, willing to change the subject; "cigarettes, pipe-tobacco, toilet articles——"

"Ah, come on," Buckhannon spoke up, and he moved away.

But Buckhannon returned to Cinnamon Street—alone, this time—and was there when the mysterious Tyrones came back from their drive.

Glamour

So far as the artist named Hal was concerned, the incident already had probably begun its drift into the limbo of forgotten things. New York was full of beautiful girls for him, and also of persons who, like the druggist, were slightly mad.

But it was different for the architect, young Buckhannon. Something had happened to him. He knew this to be the case. He was pervaded by an unrest. Life had suddenly taken on a new quality of wonder and mystery. How fascinating was the world when there was a girl like that in it! Or was she in it? Wasn't she just some fair ghost he had seen? Was it possible that she was real?

But now, here she was again—the Tyrones!—the girl of mystery and the man of mystery at her side.

They returned as they had gone, in Goodenough's old victoria; Goodenough sagging a little on the box, as he always did after the exertions of a drive. But Goodenough again straightened up somewhat as he brought his caravel safely to port in front of No. 6.

Already the butler had come running down the steps. It was clear that he also had been watching for this return. The butler assisted Tyrone and the girl to leave the vehicle, while Goodenough again held his whip aloft in imitation of the grand coachmen of other days. It was the butler who lingered behind to pay Goodenough his fare—and his tip as well, no doubt, for Goodenough touched his hat and addressed the butler as "Mr." Partridge.

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But all this as an afterthought, a sort of mental echo, so far as Eugene Buckhannon was concerned.

His eyes—and his heart, and his soul—had clung to the girl. At the top of the stoop she had paused, she had turned. She had looked at him.

Their eyes had met.

CHAPTER III

SET TO MUSIC

A FLEETING glance, and yet he staggered as if he had received a blow. Mentally he did. Physically he was transfixed. He felt that he was scarlet. He felt that he had bared his soul to the girl. His soul had been adoring her, in secret, when it had had no right to adore her. Her glance, though swift, had been so calm, so penetrating, so overwhelming, she must have discovered this.

Then Buckhannon was beginning to get a fresh grip on himself.

Mr. Tyrone hadn't noticed him. Neither had Partridge. The former had gravely mounted the high, front stoop and disappeared within the colonial doorway. Partridge, as before, had glided up the steps like one pursued by ghosts. All this in a nebulous uncertainty while Buckhannon was recovering from the shock. He felt as if the girl were looking at him still. She seemed to linger there—now nothing but a pair of blue eyes—even after Goodenough had turned his roan and fled also like one pursued, and the whole street went empty again.

He did not dare linger there, now that the girl had noticed him, so he strolled away quite as if nothing had

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happened and as if this old house were nothing more to him than any old house. But he went with the purpose of returning again as soon as it should be dark.

"Tyrone! Tyrone!" The name tolled in his brain like an echo of slow bells—"Tyrone! Tyrone!"—bringing with it the same touch of melancholy and also something of the sacredness so generally associated with the sound of slowly ringing bells. This name would forever after be a whole litany for him. So he told himself.

This was to have been his last day in New York for some time to come. On the morrow he was to have sailed for France, there to resume his studies in the *École des Beaux-Arts*. But now, should he go or should he stay? He loved France, loved Paris, loved his school, loved the noble and ancient profession that he had chosen to follow—architecture: the art of temples and homes! No wonder that Victor Hugo had called it the "king art." But Lord! Lord! he had never known such a thrill of love as he experienced now, for the girl he had barely seen, and who had barely looked at him.

He dined alone in a little restaurant not very far from Cinnamon Street. The restaurant was fairly crowded. The waitress was plump and rosy. In spite of the other calls on her attention, the waitress found time to smile at this dark-eyed youth and to serve him well. But even so, Buckhannon dined in ghostly company. Mr. Tyrone and the Golden Girl were his guests. The plump serving-wench disappeared. Her place was taken by the spectral "Mr. Partridge."

Darkness had fallen upon Cinnamon Street when he

Set to Music

again returned. And the darkness was deeper there than in almost any other street. For electricity had evidently never penetrated to this old road. It still burned gas, and the gas burned dimly.

There was a gas-lamp about midway between No. 6 and the abandoned chapel, and on that same side of the street. But this served merely to bring out the mournfulness of No. 6, which stood there like a house deserted. The shutters were closed. It was dark. It was a dwelling-place of mystery.

Grateful for the shadows which at least would keep him from being observed, even while they did keep alive the doubts and misgivings of his heart, Buckhannon walked slowly down the street. There appeared to be no one else about. He saw a spectral cat slip silently through the iron palings of the churchyard fence. Ever and again, through the blinking zone of illumination cast by the street-lamp, a bat flickered blackly.

So some thought flickered blackly in Buckhannon's mind as he gazed across at No. 6.

He made his way along the street to the abandoned chapel, and he seated himself there on the steps of it.

All around, in every direction, there sounded the muted surf of the great city's sleepless traffic—the thunder of elevated trains, the shrieks of tortured brakes, the mournful hootings of ships in the harbor. But here it was as if the night were at home, and the silence and the sweetness of it. There was a fragrance from the trees and the grass in the churchyard. There was a coolness from the unpaved earth. The stars shone down.

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Buckhannon's mood at last responded to all this. He himself was country-bred. He had always loved the night.

The silence deepened.

And then it was as if this silence had been slit, so to speak, by a silver blade of sound. What was it? The sound had brought him up from the depths of a reverie. He heard the sound again. It was the note of a flute. Some one was playing a flute in No. 6.

He listened as if his soul were at stake.

The flute note turned as if into a spray of lesser sound—the chord from a harp.

He heard a voice—her voice!

He didn't have to be told that the voice was the voice of the girl he had seen. The voice, and the music, called up a vision of her, fair and slender, demure yet full of slumbering fire. Her voice thrilled him as much as the sight of her had done. Again he was breathless. He caught the words:

"I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright."

There was a gate near the chapel-steps, and this led into the graveyard. He entered the gate. He drew closer to No. 6—as close as he dared; and there he listened again. A warble of notes from the flute; a spray of harmony from the harp, and once more the hushed vibrancy of a magic voice.

Set to Music

He found a place in the shadow of a tree. On a root of the tree he huddled down.

He could hardly have told when the music did come to an end. Even after his coarse physical senses assured him that there was silence in No. 6 it seemed to him that the air about him was still vibrant to a spirit orchestration, still shaking to the voice of an angel. He scarcely looked about him, but he was conscious of the gray tombstones—some upstanding and some recumbent; and he could almost imagine that the spirits of dead ladies had responded to those quickening harmonies and had come forth to listen as he was listening.

It was a fancy which was to be strangely fortified.

While he had been sitting there, unconscious of everything but of himself and the unseen music-makers, a shadowy figure had come ambling up the street and now stood just outside the graveyard fence almost within arm's reach of him. There, still unnoticed, the night-walker had paused. Presently it spoke, and Buckhannon was hearing a sepulchral voice. It might have been the voice of No. 6 itself:

“And the socket floats and flares,
And the house-beams groan,
And a foot unknown
Is surmised on the garret stairs. . . .”

By this time Buckhannon had sufficiently recovered himself to have recognized the source of the voice. He recognized the owner of it also. This was the old coach-

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man who had taken the Tyrones that afternoon for their drive.

While he was still meditating on this discovery and trying to catch further verses of the old man's recital, some one else had drawn near and spoken to the coachman.

"Hello!"

"Hello yourself!"

"And how's my old friend Goodenough this night?"

"As well as I hope I see my old friend Hickcock, of the armed constabulary."

Buckhannon hadn't quite caught this last allusion and he gave a cautious look. The newcomer was a policeman. The policeman made a gaunt figure—gaunt and slightly bent. He appeared to be as old as Goodenough, and Goodenough had appeared to be about as old as the white-haired butler of No. 6. All old men—everything aged in Cinnamon Street except that haunting girl.

The thought brought with it—to Buckhannon it did—some whiff of a ghostly recollection of the queer things the little mad druggist had said—they had thought that she was dead—it had been a long, long time since they had brought the coffin out——

CHAPTER IV

UNOFFICIAL

GOODENOUGH had made a remark to the effect that he had just learned a new one. And again he had begun to recite—

“ ‘The body of Judas Iscariot
Lay stretched along the snow.
’Twas the soul of Judas Iscariot
Ran swiftly to and fro.’ ”

Hickcock, the policeman, here broke in rather brutally: “ ‘Tis the soul of old man Tyrone that ought to be runnin’ to and fro.”

“It’s a pity,” said Goodenough, “you don’t write poetry yourself.”

“Why so?”

“You’ve got the imagination.”

“It ain’t imagination. It’s the things I know. I’ve been goin’ through this street now for seventeen years—keepin’ my eye on things.”

“No man,” said Goodenough, “could watch a burial lot for seventeen years without learning things—aye, and seeing them, too—also hearing them, maybe. You know the old verses—favorites of mine.” He intoned:

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"The four boards of the coffin lid
Heard all the dead man did."

"Hist!" went the policeman, Hickcock.

"What is it now?" demanded Goodenough. "Are you seeing another ghost in the old house?"

"There are worse things than ghosts connected with that old house," Hickcock affirmed. "If I had my way about it, the place would have been raided long ago. And did you hear the music a while back?"

"I did. I think it must have been the young lady."

"Mark what I tell you."

"Mark it I will," said Goodenough, with his air of vinous philosophy. And he would have shambled off into another bit of weird verse:

"The blue-eyed vampire, sated at her feast,
Smiles bloodily against the leprous moon."

But Hickcock checked him.

"Mark what I tell you," said he. "She may be singin' now, but——"

"But?" quoth Goodenough.

"But," said Hickcock eerily, "she won't be singin' long."

This was too much for Buckhannon. He crept away from what had been his unpremeditated hiding-place. His heart was pounding. The sinister import of all that he had heard had itself become a ghost. He left the graveyard by way of the chapel steps. His first intention had been to leave Cinnamon Street altogether, but

Unofficial

he saw that he had been observed by the two old cronies of the sidewalk and that some explanation would have to be forthcoming.

Both were staring at him as he came out of the chapel gate and approached the place where they stood.

"Good evening," said Buckhannon.

The others acknowledged his salutation in silence. One would have said that neither Goodenough nor Hickcock was quite certain yet that Buckhannon was not himself a ghost or a ghoul. Buckhannon saw that he had better begin.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "but I just happened to be sitting in there, and I overheard what you said."

Hickcock took a better grip on his night-stick.

"What did you say you was doin' in there?"

"I was just sitting in there," said Buckhannon, "sort of dreaming, meditating."

The policeman was suspicious. He still gripped his night-stick as if half-persuaded he might have use for it. But he turned his eyes to the coachman in search of advice. Old Goodenough understood. The coachman had regarded Buckhannon like a gentle ogre. His voice was friendly.

"And what else—when you're young," he said. "I was young myself. In there I myself once—sort of dreamed."

The policeman, satisfied on that point, proceeded to the next.

"And what did you overhear?"

Buckhannon told not only what he had overheard;

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he told how the druggist also had dropped his dark hints about the house and the people in it.

Goodenough was mellow. "'Twould be a dull place," he said, "the world without its liars."

But Hickcock remained grim. He was the old policeman, with the old policeman's adhesiveness for facts.

"There's no need for liars here," he declared "The house *has* got a bad name."

"But why has it got a bad name?" asked Buckhannon.

"If you'd been on the force as long as I have," said Hickcock, "you wouldn't have to ask. Would he, Goodenough?"

"The learned professions," said Goodenough, with humorous intent, "are his and mine. What does any professor know as compared with a cabby or a cop?"

Hickcock took umbrage. He turned on his friend.

"At that," he declared, "you said a mouthful. I got me education where me old man got his—out in the street, where you learn damn quick or you get it in the neck." Softened somewhat he turned to Buckhannon. "If I could raid that dump"—and he indicated No. 6—"I'd show you fast enough."

"Raid it," crowed Goodenough. "Go ahead and raid it."

"Yes, I won't," Hickcock retorted. "I'd as lief go up there and rap with the old brass knocker as to take a rap at his honor, the mayor, with me night-stick."

"Why?" Buckhannon persisted.

"I've been on the force for thirty years," said Hickcock, "and most of the time right in this here street."

Unofficial

I've learned a thing or two. Why didn't they raid the place when they brought the woman here?"

"What woman?"

"They brought her here in the middle of the night. She was drugged or dead. She might have been dead at that. In any case they kept her hid. Was it her, or was it the old man, who was in the black coffin they brought from the old place?"

"That was years later," said Goodenough.

"Years later it was," Hickcock admitted. But he was belligerent. "And maybe you will tell me why they was so secret about it."

"You've got me there," said Goodenough.

"Why," whispered Hickcock, as his round eyes drilled Buckhannon, "unless there had been foul play? They brought that first woman here, and she disappeared."

"They all disappear—when they're beautiful," Goodenough put in with vinous wit.

But the policeman, Hickcock, boring Buckhannon with small round eyes, stuck to his narrative:

"It was because of this first woman that young Tyrone and the old Tyrone had a quarrel. Then the young Tyrone went away. Listen to me well. And when he came back, damn me if he didn't fetch another woman with him—a strange woman, a French woman—and *she* disappeared! Disappeared for twenty years!"

"How do you mean," asked Buckhannon; "'disappeared for twenty years'?"

"Like I say," Hickcock retorted. "Twenty years ago

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this coming March she disappeared and now, unchanged—unchanged, I tell you—she's back again!"

"The same?"

"The same—and not a day older!"

Goodenough, the coachman, mused aloud:

"They made her a grave too cold and damp
For a soul so warm and true."

"But I don't understand," gasped Buckhannon.

"It's like I'm telling you," said Hickcock, fatalist.

"She disappeared twenty years ago, and now she's back again, and not a hair of her head older by an hour. Goodenough, am I right or am I wrong?"

"God knows!" exclaimed Goodenough blandly.

"Goodenough!" exclaimed Hickcock, nettled, "where is it now you do be takin' 'em drivin' every day the weather is fine?"

"That," said Goodenough, "is wherever they wish to go."

"You see," said Hickcock to Buckhannon. "He dare not tell."

"I dare not tell," Goodenough took him up. "I'd be no coachman if I did. New York'll be a merry place when the drivers and the chauffeurs tell all they know."

CHAPTER V

VAMPIRE

BUCKHANNON was like the Wedding-Guest in the Rime of the Ancient Mariner. He also had an important engagement elsewhere. He was to have left for Paris, but he couldn't go. He was fortunate enough to find a delayed passenger who was willing to relieve him of his reservation. It wouldn't have mattered anyway. He had heard the beginning of a strange tale. His Ancient Mariner was No. 6 Cinnamon Street; and even while No. 6 revealed so little of its mystery, still he felt that the tale would be told.

To drop the figure, there was a double spell about the place for Buckhannon. In the day—the afternoons—it was the girl. Almost every day he saw her—now coming out for her ride with the Man in Gray, now walking among the tombstones of the old graveyard, now seated in the sunshine of some upper window—always in her odd and beautiful old-fashioned clothes. At night, it was the spell of the house she lived in, No. 6 itself.

A week, a fortnight, a month—these may be big with consequences for the rest of New York: great buildings torn down, new skyscrapers sent aloft; one reputation

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evaporated, another crystallized; fortunes gained and fortunes lost. But weeks were as nothing in Cinnamon Street—especially when the dusk closed down, and all sounds were muffled, and all the adjacent modernities were blotted out. It was then that Cinnamon Street came into its own—as a creature native to gas-lamps and shadows, abandoned chapels and huddled trees, to slinking cats and flickering bats, and old men who talked to each other of ghostly things.

At a time like this No. 6 itself emerged from the comparative meanness and the dust and the ignominy of its transformed neighborhood into the stateliness that had once belonged both to it and the street it stood in.

Goodenough felt this, for Goodenough was a poet—had much of the weird poetry of the world by heart. To a lesser extent, even Hickcock felt it—this resurgence of No. 6 from mere brick-and-plaster existence into something spiritual. Maybe that was why Hickcock always kept his eye on old No. 6 as he talked about it after dusk had settled down.

The house looked larger then—larger and finer. And there was always that extra touch of something eery added to it by the dim lights that came and went back of its shuttered windows and the gusts of faint music it exhaled.

This was accentuated when there was a bit of mist in the air—just enough to put rainbows around the old gas-lamps, and bring out the smell of grass and trees, and to set the harbor tugs to wailing—wailing, as Good-

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enough could have quoted it, like "woman wailing for her demon lover!"

This night it was misty—misty and also tepid—as Buckhannon turned into the familiar street. It looked more than ever deserted. Not even Goodenough, the cabman, or Hickcock, the policeman of the beat, was in sight. He made his way along the dark and misty sidewalk to a point where the grounds of No. 6 joined those of the deserted chapel, where there was a pleasant smell of vegetation in the moist cool air, and there he stopped. He hankered for a bit of music. He was conscious of a deeper yearning.

Like that he was standing there when he saw a woman approach. The woman was young. He could tell that, not so much by her dimly seen contour as by the lightness and swing of her walk—not fast, but as if there were something feline about her. For the rest she appeared to be well dressed. Then a damp breath of night air coming to him from her direction brought him a faint scent of musk.

He stood perfectly still and watched her—too late, now, to have made his escape, even had he wanted to. What could he have been doing, loitering in a place like this?

The woman stopped in front of the stoop of No. 6. She looked up at the house as if undecided whether or not to go in. She put a foot on the lower step of the stoop. She withdrew it.

Buckhannon struck a match and lighted a cigarette. He started off down the street in the direction of the

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chapel. He didn't want to play the spy. But he heard a light, quick step back of him. The woman was following him. She came up with him just as he was passing one of the old street-lamps, and he turned slightly to see her as she passed. But she didn't pass. She met his look. He had the impression of a pale and handsome face, of dark eyes that glistened a little, of a large mouth with very red lips. The lips were smiling.

He had seen faces like this, on nights like this, both over in Paris and here in New York. Yet he had never been quite so impressed. There came into his thought some quotation from old Goodenough's weird anthology:

"Not a drop of her blood was human,
But she was made like a soft sweet woman . . ."

"Good evening," the strange woman said.

"Good evening," said Buckhannon. He didn't care to appear unfriendly, but he was dignified. The smell of musk, faint but disquieting, surrounded him like an emanation that was native to her—the natural scent of her smile and the look in her eyes.

"It's a nice evening," she said.

"Rather damp," said Buckhannon, and he was for going his way. But the woman stopped him. He had an uncomfortable feeling that she had been appraising him. It was evident that she had reached the conclusion that he wasn't dangerous. She touched his arm. She brought her face closer to his. Her smile grew stronger. There was a fascination about her that Buckhannon couldn't

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deny. She was disturbing. All his recent dreams and spiritualities were fled.

"Do you live in this street?" she asked.

"No."

"Not in this neighborhood?"

He shook his head.

"Do you know who lives in that house?" she asked; and she indicated No. 6. "Do you know—Nathan Tyrone?"

Buckhannon wanted to say that he did. He wanted to ask the woman what concern this was of hers. But again he shook his head. The woman had spoken softly, cast a glance in the direction of No. 6 as if afraid that she be discovered or overheard. No. 6 was dark and silent. Only a dim light from one of the windows toward the back of the house showed that it was occupied.

"I'll have to be going," said Buckhannon.

"Wait a minute," said the woman with a gust of entreaty. It was hard to refuse her. She was thirty, perhaps, but she appeared younger and very beautiful in this shadowy light. She drew Buckhannon nearer to the chapel fence. "I only want you to do me a little favor," she whispered. Again the smile, and there was a vibrancy in her voice. "You'll do it, for me; won't you?"

"Do what?"

"Knock at the door of that house and tell Partridge—he's the butler there, and he'll answer—he always does—tell him that I'm here and want to see him. Tell him that Belle is here."

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"Why don't you do this yourself?" asked Buckhannon.

"I can't. I have reasons. It might get me into trouble."

"But it might get *me* into trouble," said Buckhannon.

Her request was preposterous, but he was wavering. Buckhannon knew that he was wavering. The woman was appealing to him not so much by word as by some subtler, more potent call.

"It won't get you into any trouble," she said. "The Tyrones are going away——"

"Where?"

"To Paris——"

"Paris!"

"——and I must see the butler, Partridge, before they go." Her blandishments went finer, touched with wistfulness. It was as if back of her smile there emerged a trace of pain; her glowing eyes might have had the added brightness of tears in them. "I have a right to live in this house," she whispered; "but they won't let me. Just go and knock at the door——"

Buckhannon had a moment's dizziness. Belle had lightly raised her hands to his shoulders, drawn him toward her. With her eyes burning close to his she had kissed him on the lips.

CHAPTER VI

"HE DOES NOT KNOW"

IT was drunken old Goodenough, the cabman, who had saved the situation this night. In the suffocation following Belle's action—which must have been intended as a sort of retaining fee or payment in advance—Buckhannon heard Goodenough's voice. Goodenough, it seems, had been resting on the chapel steps and had now resumed his course toward whatever port it was for which he was steering.

"Ask *him*," said Buckhannon, a bit hastily and ashamed of himself. "*He'll* do it. Honestly he will. I don't want you to think I don't appreciate——"

But the woman showed no ill-will. She merely looked in Goodenough's direction hopefully. She gave a quick smile to Buckhannon.

"Silly boy," she breathed. "Do you come here often? Can't we see each other again?"

"I—I'm off for Paris myself," said Buckhannon. Not untruthfully, for there had suddenly swept over him a sudden nostalgia for far places, for work, for forgetfulness; as if this dream of his begun here in Cinnamon Street had been spoiled forever. "Good night," he said.

"Good night," said Belle, with her wistful smile.

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When he was well beyond No. 6 he looked back and he saw dimly the silhouettes of the woman and Good-enough there by the chapel fence where she had kissed him. Buckhannon was sick, he was excited, he was weary. This time he was going to Paris, and there would be no reprieve. And *she* was going to Paris—the Golden Girl! But what interest now could he have in that—he who had permitted a strange woman to kiss him—there in Cinnamon Street—under the other's windows? The temple had been profaned!

Yet Buckhannon returned to Cinnamon Street, this time to say farewell. It was another night—a mild and pleasant night like that first evening he had ever passed in Cinnamon Street; and now as then there was a hum and whisper of music from No. 6. He found Good-enough and Hickock seated on the steps of the chapel, and they greeted him.

"So you're leavin' fer Paris, France, to-morrow?" said Hickcock.

"That's where the weird lady said *they* were going," Goodenough put in.

"What lady?" asked Buckhannon. But he guessed who was meant. Once more—with the eye of his mind—he had a poignant vision of that pale and handsome face with the dark-glowing eyes and wide red mouth. It was almost as if he could smell musk, faintly, and could feel a creep of added warmth in the tepid air. "What lady, Goodenough, old man?"

Goodenough did not immediately reply; directly, he did not.

"He Does Not Know"

"Merciful God!" he muttered. "To think that I once held such in my arms! She was like a ghost of that other—come back to claim her love——"

"You're always seein' ghosts," said Hickcock, disgusted. "And you're drunker'n usual. Where do you get it?"

Goodenough paid no attention to this. He maundered on, and Buckhannon was interested even if the policeman was not. It appeared that Goodenough had once been a student in college, and had been expelled; and had held good positions, but never for long; and that even when he had become a driver for the original Pliny he was still a fine figure of a man; only, wine and women, women and wine——

"You were telling me about a particular woman," Buckhannon put in.

"If I'd stuck to her," said Goodenough, disconsolate. "But no, but no——"

"This weird lady," Buckhannon prompted.

"Weird, weird," said Goodenough, aloud but as if communing with himself. "I was going up the street here the other night, and there she stood in front of me. 'And will you ring the bell for me?' she asked. 'What bell?' I said. 'Of No. 6,' she answered. 'And what would you have of No. 6?' 'I want to speak to Partridge, the butler.' 'A friend of mine,' I said, and I'm looking at her hard. Those eyes, will I ever forget? 'You're Goodenough,' she said. 'You're Ernest Goodenough!' And she sort of laughed. 'And now I know you'll do what I ask,' she said; 'and maybe some day——"

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there, go and ring the bell and tell your friend, Partridge, that Belle wants to speak to him.'"

"And did you?" Buckhannon asked.

"Not the bell," said Hickcock, the policeman, sourly. "There ain't no bell."

"I told Partridge," said Goodenough, out of the depths of his thought.

"And the old crook done it," said Hickcock, seizing upon the narrative. "He comes out all trembly and talks to her—don't he, Goodenough?—the dirty old man!" But the policeman suddenly started, was peering up the street with his beady eyes and bony face denoting intense interest.

"Don't call him that," Goodenough began; but Hickcock checked him. Buckhannon also had seen the cause of the policeman's interest. A portly old gentleman had turned into Cinnamon Street and was drawing near.

"A stranger," breathed Hickcock, "and going into No. 6!"

"And why not?" Buckhannon whispered.

Hickcock gave him a glance that was almost a scowl. "In all the years I've been watchin' the place," he said, "there's never been a visitor except that strange skirt Goody was just tellin' about. Come on, now; I think we should have a better look."

The three of them left the chapel steps. They crossed the street—with an elaborate air of carelessness, which Hickcock warned them was essential. They came up into the shadows of the now darkened drug-store and stood looking across at the house of mystery.

"He Does Not Know"

One would have said that the old house was looking back at them. Its blinded windows were eyes that saw, and its door was an open mouth. The expression of this humanized mask was one of expectancy and stricken awe. So it appeared to Eugene Buckhannon.

But this could scarcely have been the impression it made on the stranger they were watching. His step was remarkably firm. Even in the dusk of Cinnamon Street it was to be seen that he carried himself with an air of well-being, of dignity and poise. He had given but a glance to the exterior of the old mansion. Then he had mounted the stone steps of the high stoop.

They heard the hollow, metallic clack as the visitor to No. 6 raised the brass knocker of the colonial door and rapped. He also seemed to know that there was no bell on the door of No. 6. The visitor hadn't sought for one.

"He knows the place," whispered Hickcock mistrustfully.

"There were visitors in the old man's time," Good-enough recalled. "This might have been one of them."

The watchers saw a pale light shine through the fanlight over the door. They saw the door swing open and saw old Partridge standing there holding aloft a candle with a fluttering flame. It gave them a flitting glimpse of the stranger's face. He was florid under his white hair. Also he was distinguished.

"An old man," brooded Hickcock. "And I wonder what it was that brought him, this time of night. They'll all bear watchin'."

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"Old men are like old houses," said Goodenough. "The less said about what goes on inside of them the better."

"Hark now!" said Hickcock. "Didn't I tell you?"

From old No. 6 there came a wraith of music—as delicate as a breath of faint perfume, as soft as the trill of a sleeping bird. But Hickcock seemed to regard this as evidence of evil. Not so, Goodenough.

"Old men—old houses," Goodenough philosophized; "they're both haunted. Watch close enough and you'll see the dim lights begin to dance; listen and you'll hear them whispering the old love-songs."

Oddly enough, there would have been an even greater suggestion of mystery to one who had heard almost the first thing that passed between the stranger and the Tyrone butler.

"Good evening, Partridge. You're looking uncommonly fit. You and I are getting on."

"Ah," quavered the butler. "It is good to see you, Judge Bancroft, sir, if I may be permitted to say so. It is a long time since we have had the honor——"

So much, and then:

"*Does he know?*"—from the judge.

This in a whisper, with an all but imperceptible nod to indicate the back of the house.

And then the judge was hanging, so to speak, on what the other might say.

And the butler's answer: "*He does not know.*"

CHAPTER VII

THE MASTER

ELECTRIC light is like a camera. It is cruel and crude. It reveals **everything**. It shows no preference as between the important and the non-essential. It glares. Often it presents in an ugly aspect that which is not essentially ugly. But candlelight, on the other hand, is the artist—revealing only that which ought to be revealed, accentuating that only which is important to the picture. So it was now as Partridge and Judge Bancroft stood there in the hall of No. 6.

Partridge had placed the candle on a console. Its flame went up in a quivering cone. Its light suffused the darkness with a mild but sparkling translucency—the spacious hall, only dimly defined by the shine of dark mahogany furniture and of woodwork painted white. It limned a striking group of these two old men standing there—so different as to the stations of them in the eyes of the world, yet so equal in the candlelight.

Partridge had taken the visitor's hat, his gloves and umbrella. Partridge stood there slightly stooped. There was a dignity about him though—dressed in black, his white hair brushed up over his ears, his pale face shining whitely as if it had been the face of the great dead actor

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lying in state. But his eyes were alive. His eyes were dark and brilliant. And in them, as well as over his face, there was an expression of something that might have been there when, say, the late Henry Irving opened his eyes on the Judgment Morn.

As for the judge, he was a choleric type. His shaven face was as pink as a baby's, and his blue eyes were as clear. The candlelight brought out the red tints of his face. It turned the native sparkle of his eyes into a gleam. It gave added-bulk to his solid shape. He must have been a terror to any man of evil conscience when he was on the bench—or, for the matter of that, to any fresh young lawyer who might have overstepped the bounds.

Perhaps the judge inspired even now a certain terror in Partridge. It would have been hard to tell. Few old men are ever terror-stricken. Perhaps it's because they know that nothing that can happen to them will matter very much anyway. But there was a tinge of awe in Partridge's look. No one could have questioned that.

"This way, sir," quoth Partridge.

And, picking up the tall candlestick and holding it aloft, he lighted the visitor back through the hall to the compartment beyond.

This was a large room—"a stately room" would describe it better. The single candle made it appear almost like the interior of a church, for there was a hint of somber furniture and of stained glass and even of high woodwork which might have been a pulpit.

But with an apology for the darkness, Partridge set about lighting other candles. There was a very beautiful

The Master

branched candlestick on a table in the center of the room—old silver, with places for half a dozen candles at least. And Partridge lit all of these. Thus gradually the room emerged from the veiling shadows somewhat like a beautiful lady laying aside her wraps.

French oak, with a beautiful waxed surface; mellow tones of garnet brocades; and the thing that had looked like a pulpit a tall broad fireplace with a dimly seen portrait above it. There were other features that may have met the visitor's casual survey—the gilded old harp in a corner of the room at the side of a music-stand, a glazed cabinet with its door carelessly open, and in this a long Morocco case, also open, displaying a silver-mounted flute.

"Still burning candles," said the judge.

"Yes, sir," said Partridge, with as much of easy good-nature as a well-trained servant might display in the presence of a visitor. "The elder Mr. Tyrone preferred them because of his own father's preference for them, and Mr. Nathan Tyrone has never seen fit to change——"

"I see," droned the visitor. "He was expecting me?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" Partridge was lighting the last of the candles. "I shall go and announce you, sir."

Judge Bancroft snorted.

"Still all the old formalities," he said.

"The Tyrones have always been conservative, sir," said Partridge. He spoke with perfect respect, yet somewhat as if he were one of the Tyrones himself. The inflection wasn't lost on the judge. The judge was in a mellow mood in keeping with the candlelight. "They have always

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dreaded change," Partridge had murmured, as he gave a last look about him to assure himself that everything was proper for his master's presence.

"They've dreaded change," said Judge Bancroft, "but life's a railroad track, Partridge. You've got to hop or you'll get run over."

"You're right, sir," said Partridge, permitting himself a discreet laugh.

"Still paying the pension of—the harlot?"

Partridge's laugh went out. "She had the effrontery to come here to the house the other night."

"My God! She didn't——"

"I saw her myself. She insisted that she needed a special sum—a doctor's fee, I believe."

"And you gave it to her?"

"I—I did, sir."

"Blackmail!"

Partridge made a despairing gesture.

"And he never asks for an accounting?" queried the judge.

"Mr. Nathan, sir? Oh, no, sir! You see, he is so occupied with the epic poem he is writing; and, even so, he never did occupy himself with financial matters. But I believe he did wish to make various general inquiries of you, sir. You won't tell him—you won't hint——"

The judge raised an assuring palm.

"——It would kill him," Partridge whispered. "And now, sir, if you'll permit me——"

"Just how long have you been in the family, Partridge?" the judge inquired.

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"Mr. Nathan's grandfather first employed me when I was a boy," said Partridge softly, as he raised his face the better to reflect. "We were together with General Grant. Let's see! Yes, quite sixty years."

"You've liked it."

"It has been my life, sir."

"And life—is life."

"Yes! But it has had its compensations!"

Again there passed between the judge and the butler the look of two old men who don't have to say all that they think.

"I'll announce you, sir." And Partridge was gone.

The judge had sunk into a large square armchair. He looked at the candles. The candles spread their light about them. There were a number of portraits dimly revealed besides the portrait over the mantelpiece. Most of the portraits were those of men—previous Tyrones, any one would have said who had once seen the face of the Man in Gray who lived here now. There was a grimness about all the faces, yet a hint of poetry as well—a suggestion of poetry and romance.

There was old Eliphalet Tyrone, who had fought his frigate in the war of 1812. There was Elihu, to whom Edgar Allan Poe had dedicated his first book of poems. There was the Daniel Tyrone who had taken Partridge into his service when Partridge was a boy, and who had been with General Grant throughout all that last slaughtering campaign against the immortal Lee. Thus it was that the next in line had come to be named Ulysses—Ulysses Tyrone, the father of Nathan.

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Ulysses Tyrone looked down at the judge and the judge looked up at Ulysses. The two of them had been friends—as much as Ulysses would ever admit any man to his friendship. A recluse he had been, living here in the house where his ancestors had lived before him, dying at last in the chamber where they had died.

"You dominating old Puritan," Judge Bancroft muttered softly as he continued to look up at the portrait of his former friend. But there was no harshness back of the words.

The portrait on the wall looked back at him without change of its grim expression, and so the original of it had often enough looked back at the judge in life.

Then the visitor heard Partridge clear his throat, and the judge turned in his chair to see Partridge at the door holding back the damask curtain. Judge Bancroft was not in the habit of doing reverence to any man, but he arose to his feet and remained standing as Nathan Tyrone came in.

CHAPTER VIII

A PORTRAIT BY LA TOUR

HE made a striking figure, did Mr. Nathan Tyrone. He would have made a striking figure anywhere and at any time—graceful, erect, proud. His abundant hair was long and wavy, in perfect order but tossed back from his white forehead rather in the style of some other century than the present one.

His face was as finely chiseled as a cameo, but it was as strong as the face of a Greek statue. Of the portraits on the wall he most resembled that of Elihu, who had been the friend of Poe.

Nathan himself had a face that would have inspired that melancholy poet's love. Nathan himself might have written "The Raven," or "Ulalume," or "Annabel Lee"—especially "Annabel Lee." So one would have said even while still uninformed concerning his history.

In spite of his pride, there was no slightest trace of condescension as he greeted his visitor. Most of the Tyrones had run to sternness and melancholy, but they had all been gracious.

"This is indeed a pleasure," said this Tyrone.

His voice was soft, well modulated, soothing. His whole presence was that. His costume was inclined to

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the Byronic—a roll-collar, a flowing tie of plum-colored silk, a velvet house-jacket of a darker shade. He offered his hand. His hand was long and slender.

"And a pleasure for me," said the judge.

But the judge, one would have said, was not perfectly at ease. It was that uneasiness which always exists between men of a different type when they find themselves alone together—and possibly something more than that.

Not that they were altogether alone—Partridge was there.

It would have been a lesson in deportment to any young servant to have observed the way that Partridge occupied himself about his master's business. Partridge had silently produced a heavy chair from a shadowy corner, had placed it with such exquisite precision as to time and position that Tyrone was enabled to seat himself without so much as a glance.

"The weather continues mild," said Tyrone, as he fell into a graceful position. "I was fearful of calling you out in the rain."

Judge Bancroft smiled, but he remained a trifle stiff.

"Many a rainy night I used to come here in your father's time," he said heartily, but instantly recognized the fact that perhaps the allusion was not altogether a happy one. "No," he added, with a trace of confusion, "there is a little mist, but no rain, and the weather is mild——"

Tyrone was instantly for putting his visitor at his ease on this score also.

"I remember well your visits to my father," he said

A Portrait by La Tour

affably. "And I remember how fond you were of my grandfather's port—I believe it was some that *his* grandfather had grown on some estate or other he held for a number of years in the Alto Douro. Oh, Partridge!"

He hadn't raised his voice. He hadn't turned to see whether or not the butler was there. But there the butler was.

"Yes, sir," Partridge had replied softly. "Immediately, sir."

And Partridge was gone—one shadow less in the room.

"You wished to inquire concerning the present condition of the estate," said Judge Bancroft, when the servant was gone.

Tyrone smiled.

"You know that I do not usually occupy myself with such matters," he said. "I suppose that you would think better of me if I did." He lifted one of his fine white hands in deprecation as the visitor would have made a protest. "I should think better of myself! But in view of my approaching visit to France——"

He completed what he had to say by an explanatory gesture full of grace.

"I have the figures"—and Judge Bancroft made a move to draw certain papers from the breast pocket of his coat.

"Quite unnecessary, my dear sir," said Tyrone. "I am quite incompetent. I never could understand figures—especially when they have to do with money. Just a general statement will be quite sufficient."

"The estate has shrunk none since your father's time,"

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said the judge, still fumbling with his papers. "Certain holdings, of course, have gone the way of all flesh. These concern chiefly, however"—he adjusted his glasses, scrutinized one of his papers. "Let's see! There was the company for refining whale oil—the New Home Spinning-Wheel Factory—passenger-packets on the Erie Canal——" The judge droned through a number of others. "But other properties have appreciated in proportion—the farm on East Twenty-third Street, the warehouse in Coenties Slip——"

When the judge paused, however, he saw that his client had ceased to listen. Tyrone had fallen into a reverie. His head was thrown back. He was gazing at the portrait that hung over the fireplace. It was the portrait of a woman—a portrait still dimly seen, for the light was unfavorable. There was a momentary silence.

Then Partridge came in bearing a silver tray. On the tray there was a bottle with two glasses. Silently, Partridge placed his tray on the old table-desk beside which his master sat.

Partridge deftly pulled the cork, decanted the dark-red wine into the sparkling crystal.

"It was chiefly on my daughter's account," said Tyrone, coming out of his reverie.

As he said this it was almost as if the red light of the old port had cast a reflection to his pale face.

"Is that her portrait?" inquired the judge with reference to the picture above the fireplace. He had returned the useless papers to his pocket.

"That," Tyrone replied, with a flush of interest also

A Portrait by La Tour

manifest in his voice, "is La Tour's famous portrait of Mlle. de la Vallière." He pronounced the French name with a caress. The caress lingered there as he repeated the name and amplified it: "Mlle. Mélissine de la Vallière."

"Oh, yes," said the judge. He was not altogether uninformed in art matters. "La Tour—eighteenth century—one of the greatest!"

"The very greatest, I love to consider him," said Tyron; "the very greatest—of the greatest century—of the country I have always loved next to America. You may know—of course, you must have known—that it cost quite a small fortune to acquire it."

"Yes," intoned the judge, reminiscent. "And if you will permit me—of course, I know that it is very beautiful——"

Anticipating his master's wishes, Partridge betimes had taken a candle from the music-cabinet and approached the portrait. To either side of it were triple brackets holding other candles. These Partridge lit with the candle he carried. He did this with a certain reverence, somewhat as if he were an officiating priest at the shrine of a saint.

Softly, magically, the portrait revealed itself—the face of a girl who had been exceedingly fair. Her eyes were darkly fringed. Her eyebrows were delicate and dark. But her hair was the color of pale-gold—fluffily light and almost straight on top and at her white temples but a cluster of brief curls over her ears and about her delicate throat.

The judge had risen the better to see.

The House With a Bad Name

"Ah!" he breathed.

Tyrone also had risen. He and his visitor stood there side by side. Back of them stood the butler, Partridge; and even on the butler's face there was a look of wistfulness and constrained reverence, odd in the face of a man in his position.

"I always knew that you were a poet—that you were an artist," said the judge.

Tyrone was silent. His melancholy eyes rested on the portrait. He lifted himself from his reverie and spoke with a preliminary sigh:

"Let us raise our glasses to her memory!"

CHAPTER IX

OF MME. TYRONE

YOU never saw Mme. Tyrone," said the master of the house, when he and the visitor had gallantly completed this little ceremony. They had drunk their toast in silence. They still remained standing in front of the portrait. The portrait looked down at them—a face that was demure, yet filled with a slumbering fire.

"I never had that honor," said the judge.

"When she died," said Tyrone, with nothing of sadness about his voice except possibly in the undertone of it, "I was particularly distressed by the thought that I had no portrait of her. It was strange, too, in view of the fact that she had already appeared for a season or two at the Paris Odéon. But she had never wanted to be photographed, and she was the despair of all the artists who had tried to paint her."

"I dare say," said the judge, with his eyes on the portrait.

"For a long time," Tyrone pursued, "I was inconsolable. It was as if she had vanished utterly. She was like no other woman in the world—not in the present world. She was a woman—a spirit—out of the eight-

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eenth century. Even her clothing—much of it—had been inspired by the eighteenth century.” Tyrone was recounting all this with a certain gayety, almost; but this was merely a froth, so to speak, to disguise the depths of his feeling. “It was during this period, immediately following her death, while I was roaming about France pretty much as a mad man, that I came upon this old portrait by La Tour. It looked so much like Mme. Tyrone—let us be seated.”

They resumed their chairs. There for a time Judge Bancroft may have believed that his host had finished this part of his tale. The judge watched Partridge go about his business of arranging the curtains, straightening a chair here and there—all this unobtrusively, yet possibly with the air of one who listens and has the right to listen. An observer would have said that the judge, as well as Partridge, was on his guard against some surprise—against any revelation, at any rate, of that secret knowledge he and the butler shared.

“So you will forgive me,” said Tyrone, emerging from one of his reveries, “for putting you to the inconvenience of finding such sums of money as were necessary to secure the picture.”

Partridge had turned. He and the visitor exchanged a glance.

“Certainly,” said the judge.

“It was a spiritual resemblance,” said Tyrone. “Ah, the women who have been the glory that is France!—the charm!—the intelligence!—the sympathy!—the wit!—the fire!—the devotion!”

Of Mme. Tyrone

"And the beauty!" breathed the judge.

"And the beauty," Tyrone echoed. "All this was incarnate in La Tour's model, up there. Incarnate again in her who became Mme. Tyrone! If my father had only understood!"

"Your father thought——"

"He thought," cried Tyrone softly, "that because I had married a lady of the theater I had again let romance get the better of me. He compared her to that unfortunate I had merely rescued out of a perhaps mistaken sense of charity. You are familiar with that—that adventure, of course."

"Your father had told me—you will excuse my fashion of putting it—that you had brought here a woman of the streets, that you had concealed her here in the house, to the scandal of the neighborhood."

Tyrone laughed without mirth.

"I know that I have lived—that I am living now—in a house with a bad name," he said. "Oh, I hear the whispers: 'The house with a bad name!' 'What is the mystery?' 'The house is haunted!' 'It's the house with a bad name!'" He got to his feet and strode about a bit. He paused at the music-cabinet. He picked up his flute and breathed a note from it. He let his delicate hands brush the strings of the harp. A chord or two responded. He abruptly turned. "I vowed I would never explain," he cried. "But I will explain—now that it's too late."

"No explanation is necessary," said the visitor.

"Which would be the one thing to make me want to explain," said Tyrone. "I dreamed of bringing beauty

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into the world—making still more beautiful whatever was already beautiful. One night, while I was still nothing much more than a boy, I found a creature—a girl—a woman—huddled in the snow—a dark and lonely street—sinister neighborhood—Christmas Eve. Drugs and starvation, or both—she looked as if she might be suffering from both. She was thin and white. But she might have been beautiful. She was still beautiful, in a way—with her hollow, flaming eyes.

“And what touched me most was that she had tried to make herself still more beautiful—had painted her lips, put on a set of tawdry furs, pitiful little blouse of red satin; not the make-up for a shroud! So I brought her home, smuggled her into the house, bull-dozed Partridge into caring for her. Oh, we both knew what my father would say! He wouldn’t believe in my innocence.”

“He was—a Tyrone,” said the judge. “He was merely sensitive about the good name of his house.”

It was clear that by this time both the visitor and the butler were satisfied that Tyrone had no surprises in store. Some such assurance passed between them in another glance.

Still Partridge lingered for a while. He had an eye for the glasses. He had taken away the glasses that had already been used, had replaced them with others that sparkled clean in the candlelight. And he had listened, head down and humbly, yet with a sorrowful judgment on his waxen face, to all that the others had said. But now, having remained as long as he decently could,

Of *Mme. Tyrone*

or having bethought himself of some duty elsewhere, he quietly withdrew.

"You were speaking about some voyage you intended to make," Judge Bancroft intimated, willing to turn the conversation into a less emotional strain. "You were going abroad?"

"To France," said Tyrone, resuming his chair.

"For a long time?"

"Possibly for a year."

"And you were thinking about the finances?"

Tyrone tossed up his hands. "I've never given finances a thought since—let's see—since I cabled for funds to buy the portrait. I've always left such concerns to you——"

"And Partridge."

"Yes, without disrespect to yourself."

"There is no disrespect in associating me with Partridge," Judge Bancroft affirmed. "I consider it rather an honor."

"He *has* been devoted," Tyrone assented with genuine feeling. "He performed the difficult feat of being loyal to both my father and myself during the period of our estrangement. He alone seemed to be capable of comprehending all the facts—the facts of that first romantic—charity of mine, and then again the facts concerning my marriage and my subsequent bereavement."

"Your double bereavement," said the judge.

"My double bereavement, indeed. It was Partridge who told me that my father was sinking. It was another struggle of the Tyrone pride. But I came here to the

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old house to make my peace with him." Tyrone let his eyes dwell for a moment on the portrait of his father which hung on the wall to his right. Tyrone himself smiled, but the face of his father looked back at him without compromise—haughty and sensitive. "Unfortunately, he was unable to see us. He died. I fully expected to be disinherited. It would have been like him if he had disinherited me."

The judge used his handkerchief. He made some remark about having caught a slight cold.

"But they were absurd," said Tyrone, "those rumors that we had had a death-bed quarrel, or anything like that. Partridge knows. Partridge was there. Partridge assured me then, and has assured me since, that my father died with but one regret—that he had declined to see the lady who had consented to be my wife."

The judge gave a slight lurch.

"I was under the impression," he said, "that Mme. Tyrone had left you a daughter."

"She did"—and there was a rekindling of fervor about Tyrone as he made his declaration. "It was concerning her, chiefly, that I wished to speak to you to-night. You shall see her presently. You will pardon me if I speak of her with rather more than the usual feeling that fathers display in speaking about their daughters. But first, should anything happen to me, you will, of course, see that she is protected, that the family estates pass on to her without annoyance to her in any way. I am as poor a lawyer as I am a financier. And, I fancy, so is she."

Of Mme. Tyrone

"You should be alive for a good many years," the visitor said.

"I am not so sure," said Tyrone. "You know how it is when a man suddenly finds his life's work complete."

"You refer to your epic poem?"

"Not to the one I have been writing," Tyrone replied. "I refer to the greater work—a work that has been like the fulfillment of all those early dreams of mine—a work like God's—a work of living creation."

CHAPTER X

"IN HER IMAGE"

THERE for a time it was as if there were, indeed, some work of magic under discussion here in this house to which the neighbors ascribed magic. Tyrone could cast that magical atmosphere about him—an effect subtly aided by the candlelight, by the old furniture, by the portraits staring down. The portraits were not so much like painted pictures as they were like ghosts—present, albeit long since dead; passive, albeit actively interested.

They seemed to say: "We had a share in this."

It was not black magic, though, such as the neighbors would have suspected. White magic, according to the testimony of Tyrone—pure white.

"When Mme. Tyrone died," Tyrone said, "I was mad enough to consider this child of mine as the cause of her death. She died, you know, at the time the child was born."

"There is a consolation," the judge began slowly.

"There is," Tyrone put in; "but I did not know it. I was blind. I was dead to everything except my loss. When she was dead the world was dead. There was nothing left of the world but a shadow and a voice. The

"In Her Image"

voice said: 'She is dead.' There was no laughter. There was no music. Oh, I tried hard enough to get my sanity back. I went to the places we had loved—the woods of St. Cloud, the banks of the Marne. It was always the same—the ripples on the river and the breeze in the poplars, they said the same thing: 'She is dead!'"

Tyrone turned slightly in his chair and raised his eyes to the La Tour portrait. He studied it while his mood underwent a subtle change.

"The first gleam of hope, and the first time that voice lost something of its force," he said, "was when I saw this. Until then I had been hopeless. The portrait gave me a vision. I was no longer so blind. It somehow told me that death is not the end and that it cannot be the end. Mlle. de la Vallière, the subject of this portrait, had breathed her lovely last two centuries ago. But there she still was. There she still is. What is the loved one, after all, but a vision? So I argued."

"When we grow old," said the judge, "death itself becomes a hope and a beautiful thing. What had become of the child?"

"I had hardly known—had hardly cared," said Tyrone. "I had entrusted her to the care of the nurse who had been with Mme. Tyrone at the last. My only communication with this woman since had been to send her occasional funds."

"Partridge went over to France at about this time, I believe," said the judge.

"He sought me out," said Tyrone. "I had done all

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I could to avoid him. But he found me, in spite of myself—found me in more ways than one.”

“I do not quite get the allusion.”

“He found me in the hotel on the Quai des Orfèvres, where Mme. Tyrone and I had lived on our return to Paris. It was he who coaxed me to go and see my daughter.”

“And you did so?”

“No! I was still obdurate. But Partridge insisted, one day, that I take the air in the Luxembourg Gardens. It was there that I had first seen my wife—under the chestnut-trees—with the gold sunlight and the blue shadows making it a picture world, and making everything that was beautiful twice as beautiful still. A day like that!”

Tyrone broke off in his poetic flight, brought the focus of his attention back to Judge Bancroft.

“I bore you,” said Tyrone. “I forget myself.”

“You interest me greatly,” the judge rejoined soberly. “And so Partridge showed you—your child?”

“He managed it as if it were an accident,” said Tyrone. “While I was seated there under the trees a woman—the old nurse—went by with a child—a little girl—a little girl that had pale-gold hair and tiny dark eyebrows and eyes that were also dark, but large and blue. It was when she turned to look at me that I saw her eyes.”

Tyrone paused in his recountal. He smiled. But he was breathing heavily.

“And it was she?” droned the judge.

“Not only she—my living daughter—but that other.”

"In Her Image"

"You mean——"

"Her mother! The vision was there again. The mother lived again in the child. For me, it was vertigo—it was swoon. I was Lazarus coming out of the tomb."

"Yes," said the judge.

"I was like that," said Tyrone. "I suppose that I made an absurdity of myself. At least, it would have been absurd anywhere else than in Paris. But in Paris people are bolder to be themselves and others are less prone to criticise. I went to my knees, there in the dust of the walk. But no one laughed. No one stared—not very long. It was a father who had found his child. Perhaps they even guessed that it was more than that."

"And then?"

"Then—then—I began to live again. I think that she was a little afraid of me, at first. It would have been a wonder if she hadn't been. I couldn't allow her out of my sight, day or night. It was as if I had found her mother again—as if her mother were there——"

"I have watched my own daughters grow," said the judge.

"She grew. She had looked on this portrait, from the first, as the portrait of her mother. Even myself, I had come to regard it as such. Day by day I saw the child develop. It was like watching the growth of that other—from childhood, with all the beauty and fragrance of her future compressed into her little white soul—and then, one day, I caught her reflection in a mirror. She smiled at me. Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Certain kinds," the judge confessed.

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"The old miracle of the first Easter was a ghost-story," said Tyrone, reverently, yet joyously. "This also was a resurrection. There she stood! There she stood! There was only one other thing to render the illusion—no, the reality!—perfect, and I had the means. Mme. Tyrone had always loved beautiful clothes. They were still there, laid away. When my daughter dressed herself in her mother's clothes—ah, me!"

And Tyrone put his hand on his heart.

"We're going to France together," said Tyrone; "over the same course her mother and I followed. He seemed to be touched by a premonition. His breath failed him. He whispered: "But, God! God!—should something happen to her—should anything come between us——"

Tyrone did not complete his statement. He glanced toward the door, remained transfixed. Partridge had appeared at the door. Partridge held the damask curtains back. He announced:

"Miss Tyrone!"

CHAPTER XI

OUT OF THE PAST

IN spite of all that had been said, the judge seemed to have been taken somewhat unawares. He looked at the girl who entered. He gave a hasty glance at the portrait above the fireplace. He was looking at the girl again. He was the old lawyer, the old man of the world. He had come into contact with many women, some of them beautiful. Some of these had drawn upon all that they possessed of art and instinct—and on the wardrobes of Fifth Avenue shops as well—to sway him. But he found himself, mentally at least, catching his breath. All this while he was making his bow.

“And this,” Tyrone was saying, “is Mélissine.”

Her dress was a pale pink velvet that had silver reflections in it. The simple bodice was cut round and low in front. The sleeves came barely to the elbow, there flaring wide. At throat and elbow there appeared the frills of what appeared to be an undergarment of foamy cambric, this against the pearl-like luster of her skin. The skirt was long and full and yet it was as obedient to the movement and grace of the wearer as the plumage of a bird.

She had entered modestly, with a queer mingling of

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pride and timidity. This had dissolved at once into mere brightness and affection at sight of her father. To him she had fluttered, rather than walked, and kissed him fondly on the cheek—holding both of his hands in hers as she did so, as unaffectedly as a child.

In all she did there was such a deft mixture of art and artlessness that there was no telling which was which.

For a moment or longer the judge was aware of the mother-of-pearl quality of her cheek and throat, of the surf of color and perfume that beat about him, and of the knowledge that he was almost like a boy of eighteen in this presence. Then Mélissine Tyrone was smiling at him—her pink lips parted over small and dazzling teeth. For the first time he perceived adequately the pansy quality of her eyes, the dark, fine strength of her eyebrows, and also that one touch of black—a beauty spot as ever was—at the upper curve of her right cheek. Then her warm, delicate fingers were pressing his own.

The contact—the whole contact—had taken the judge himself right back a century or two. He himself was a Virginian, sir, by descent. And no gentleman of old Virginia was ever more gallant than the judge was now.

He bowed low. He brought the lady's fingers to his lips. It was natural. The girl cast this sort of an atmosphere about her—an atmosphere of courts and gallantry.

"My dear," said the judge, "could your grandfather but have lived to see you——"

There had been no formal introduction. The girl now responded with a slight curtsy full of grace. And the

Out of the Past

judge saw that her eyes could be tender as well as humorous and wise.

"He bequeathed me his friendship," she said. She gave a smiling glance to her father. She returned to the slightly baffled but wholly pleased visitor. "I have so long wished to tell you so—to thank you." Another dazzling smile.

"Thank me?"

"Oh, for innumerable hours."

The judge's mind was a flood of comment. What art! What artlessness! And he had considered himself wise in the ways of the world; very, very wise in the ways of women. To him had come mothers to plead for their sons. To him had come daughters of sin to plead on their own account. He had reared daughters of his own.

"You mean?" he demanded, refusing to believe.

"Yes! The books you gave to grandfather; wonderful books!"

"Dear, dear!" cried the judge. "Not my work on 'Torts'!"

"More particularly," she answered lightly and gravely, "your work on 'Comparative Jurisprudence'—although there were some things I confess I didn't understand in your chapter"—her voice took on a rising inflection, and was it art or artlessness?—"your chapter on the primitive history of marriage."

"Why, er——"

"Pray be seated," she said.

Partridge was there with a chair, just as he had been

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when her father had first seated himself. And Mélissine also seated herself with the same perfect ease. She was a child. She was a woman two centuries old. That was her portrait on the wall. She would have been beautiful in almost any light. She was a vision in the candlelight.

As she turned her graceful back after requesting the guest to resume his chair the polished texture of her skin was finer than that of the stuff she wore. On one of her delicate shoulders also was a tiny round spot that showed almost black through her transparent cambric. Another beauty-spot, surely, but whether real or artificial the judge could not have told. The judge sighed.

Her yellow hair was so fine it was almost opalescent where the light struck it. Her eyes loomed shadowy. In repose her face was touched with melancholy—a hint of reproach. But it was never in repose when either she spoke to her guest or looked at her father.

She looked at her father now. She put out a hand impulsively and let it rest on his. Her playfulness reasserted itself.

"Am I too late," she inquired, "to share in the festivities?"

Tyrone, his whole being absorbed in his fond contemplation of her, caught the allusion to the empty glasses.

"We've already drunk to your good health," he answered. "I dare say you would like to drink to the health of your favorite author."

Mélissine paused long enough to give the judge a sparkling look. She languidly gave her attention to Par-

Out of the Past

tridge. The butler had kept his eyes upon her. There was a passion of service in the butler's face. It was evident to all who might behold that to serve this mistress was for him a beautiful and holy thing.

"Partridge," said MéliSSine, "I think that you may prepare me a cup of camomile."

"Perfectly, Miss Tyrone."

Judge Bancroft was still in the daze where the girl's comment on his law-books had left him. Into his mind, like ships seen through a golden mist, there floated the stories he had heard or read about the women of the Golden Age of France—Mme. Roland, Ninon de Lenclos, Adrienne Lecouvreur, the beautiful and spiritual Récamier, and—MéliSSine herself!

"While we are waiting for your camomile," Tyrone suggested, "perhaps you will favor us with music."

"Do!" begged the judge.

Again that sparkling look with which she had favored him before. With perfect obedience and self-possession she arose and went over to her harp.

The judge had gone his way—as haunted an old man as ever was, to borrow from the language of Good-enough. This night Nathan Tyrone had consulted him for the first time since the elder Tyrone's death. And many an odd and mysterious state of affairs had developed itself within the judge's capacious mind in the years he had served his fellow men, but there had never been a state of affairs like this.

He had thought himself hardened. It was not so.

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His heart was as tender as a boy's. As a boy's heart might have quivered—and as one boy's heart was quivering now, no doubt—so quivered his heart responsive to the memory of the girl who had sung and played for him, and who had praised his terrible old law-books, and who wore the manners as well as the clothing and spoke the speech of another century.

And there was Partridge, the old butler, with his whispered assurance: "*He does not know!*"

No wonder the judge had given Partridge a silent embrace in the dusky hall as Partridge—the perfect servant always—passed him his hat, his umbrella, and his gloves.

CHAPTER XII

LOVE SONG

THIS day Paris was as Tyrone had described it in his talk with Judge Bancroft—a city of gold sunlight and blue shadows. The Tyrones had been there for two weeks. They had taken a boat at Boston—for Tyrone had insisted on sailing in the same ship that had carried him and his bride back to France these twenty years ago. He and Mélissine had followed the old itinerary that Tyrone and Mélissine's mother had followed then—loitering through Normandie at old-fashioned inns; traveling by diligence to villages that tourists never heard of; coming at last to Paris and there putting up in the little old hotel on the Quai des Orfèvres.

A spirit honeymoon all this was for Nathan Tyrone.

This daughter of his represented the dreams and aspirations of a lifetime. It was worth it, all the tragic cost. Of her mother, Mélissine was the perfect image, body, heart, and soul. It was a reincarnation. Mélissine was dead; yet here was Mélissine alive. For Mélissine he had mourned; yet now again he felt the touch of her hand, he saw her bosom rise and fall, he saw the light in her eyes, heard her voice, heard the *frou-frou* of her

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unforgettable garments. For Mélissine—this Mélissine—was even now wearing the things that had constituted her mother's very elaborate trousseau at the time of her marriage.

It made the French people stare, but they stared with a tenderness, with an admiration!

"Let's go up to the Luxembourg," Tyrone proposed.

"Oh, let's!" said Mélissine.

Tyrone was confronted by some devil of dread and misgiving which he couldn't quite see, but which he was trying to overcome by reason. He had life and he had love, he asserted through the silent megaphone of his thought. He was living a love-story more tender and spiritual than any man had ever lived before. It was as if his original love-story had died and gone to heaven and that this was the angel of it come back to him.

"You're fooling yourself," the devil sneered.

Maybe it was the autumn that cast such melancholy about him. This was autumn. The chestnut trees were brown and red except where some of them were putting out a second blooming—just as Tyrone himself was doing—a flash of spring-time green very fresh and beautiful, but rather touching to one who reflected on the coming snows.

The glamour which is Paris was never stronger. It peopled the streets and places with the rabble and the knights and the ladies of forgotten centuries, with troubadors and gallant beauties. François Villon was afoot again; and *Trilby*, and *Mimi Pinson*.

Love Song

They came up into the gardens—Tyrone and his daughter—and walked away under the chestnut trees.

The daughter understood the father's mood. She didn't speak. Let him sail the bark of his dreams where he would! She had a shallop of her own.

She had never spoken to her father about that young man she had noticed in Cinnamon Street—the young man with the dark eyes—he who had looked at her so often with such an unforgettable expression—but she had thought about him. She thought of him now. She thought of how it was of him she was thinking every time she sang the serenade:

"I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night . . ."

It was a song her mother had sung—so her father had told her—and she had always loved it. She would have loved it anyway.

Tyrone was leaning by this time on one of the stone balustrades looking out over the sunken gardens. Mélis-sine saw an unoccupied chair under a neighboring tree. She went over to it and sat down.

When the winds are breathing low
And the stars are shining bright . . .

The words curiously persisted in her thought; so did the memory of the young man she had noticed. She remembered his eyes particularly. They were so dark and glowing. Although there had been the whole wide

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street between herself and the owner of the eyes that first time she saw him, she remembered it now, she had been rather frightened.

And now, here she was feeling frightened again. It was a rather delicious sensation.

Tyrone continued to stare out across the sunken gardens absorbed in his broodings. The wide flowerbeds shimmered underneath his gaze. Over there, at a little distance, there was a wide basin in which children were sailing their toy yachts. There was one particularly gorgeous boat with a bright-red hull and a snowy sail. There came a gust of air a little too strong, and the yacht capsized.

Lord of the Inscrutable!

Men also sailed their toy boats—gorgeous craft sometimes fabricated out of brilliant dreams. An extra breath out of heaven and the things capsized! Tyrone continued to lean there, musing.

Mélassine had taken off the small, limp, finely woven straw hat she had worn this day. Both the wind and the light were at work in the cobweb filaments of her hair—fluffily straight on top and over her temples, gathered in so many natural curls over the alabaster of her neck and shoulders. Over her shoulders was the sheerest of opalescent veils. No wonder the artists among the students turned and stared.

Perhaps it was this that gave her that delicious thrill of vague disquiet—just as if she had been back in Cinnamon Street again and that youth looking at her so absurdly. She raised her eyes. She felt a creep of

Love Song

blood-red warmth coming to the surface from her palpitant heart.

There was the youth himself.

No, it couldn't be he. That would be altogether too absurd, altogether too wonderful. This as she cast an agitated glance in the direction of her father. But her father was still leaning on the balustrade, looking out across the flower-beds. She wished he were here at her side. She was grateful that he wasn't. She looked down into her lap. It couldn't—couldn't possibly—be the youth she had seen in Cinnamon Street.

Yet she was in an agony. She would have to look up again. She did so, soberly—quite as if nothing had happened—or as if nothing could happen.

It was he.

Their eyes had met.

He appeared to be even more frightened than she was.

At sight of Méliissine he had just about been able to keep his feet. But his soul had swooned.

Now he was recovering himself a little bit. There was an appeal in his eyes. Ought he to smile? Ought he to bow? Ought he to stroll away, thus showing her what a perfect gentleman he was? Then he had dropped into a chair, some twenty feet from Méliissine.

All this in that fourth dimension of dreams, where seconds expand to hours and days and lifetimes. The youth of the dark eyes over there had been looking at Méliissine for hours; for hours she had been looking at him. Yet a butterfly that had lighted on a near-by flower when the incident began had not yet drunk its fill.

CHAPTER XIII

TO PARADISE

NOW there appeared another figure in this cosmic drama—a person of consequence to subsequent developments, but carefully disguised. To all outward appearance, this was merely one of those women, sharp-eyed and ruddy, who go about collecting two sous from the chair-users. She was neat, dressed in homely black, even to her black apron and her black straw hat. At her generous waist there was an open black satchel containing a weight of jingling coins.

"Merci, mademoiselle!"

Mélistine looked up a trifle startled at the apparition at her side. The woman smiled at her. And Mélistine smiled back, but Mélistine was without a cent. She started to say so. Would *madame* kindly ask her father over there?

But before she could get this out in her pretty, faltering French, there was the woman on her way again, and there was the young man standing where the woman had stood.

"I took the liberty," he said.

He said this as if he had a halter about his neck. There were beads of perspiration on his fore-

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head. He was smiling, but there was agony in his eyes.

"Oh, thank you," murmured Méliissine, looking up at him; "father——"

She found the boy rather touching now. She felt sorry for him. Also she admired him—greatly. And yet he did look so absurdly miserable that she had to laugh at him, just a little. She went instantly sober again.

He had pronounced her name.

"It is nothing—Miss Tyrone!"

"I—I——" said Méliissine.

"My name," he floundered, "is Buckhannon."

"Thank you, Mr. Buckhannon. You were very kind."

"Did you"—and Buckhannon had the frenzied courage of a man, not very strong and not very expert, but as brave as can be, who fights a mob—"did you bring your harp with you?"

"How ridiculous!" laughed Méliissine, while her color came and went in ineffable waves. "How did you know that I played the harp?"

"I heard you."

Hitherto Méliissine had felt herself to be the perfect mistress of the situation. It was true that Buckhannon was the first young man she had ever spoken to. But he had been so obviously at her mercy. Now suddenly her poise was gone.

"I don't see—don't see why you should have thought it was I."

"I knew it was when I heard you sing."

"Sing?"

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"I arise from dreams of thee——"

Perhaps he hadn't intended to put so much meaning into his brief quotation, hadn't foreseen that their eyes would meet at the very moment that the words were tumbling forth like a message of his own.

"And so you are acquainted with Cinnamon Street!" said Méliissine, seeking a parry.

"And dear old Partridge!"

"You know Partridge?"

"I love him. I think he's great!"

"Why, where did you ever get acquainted with Partridge?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I never did."

They both laughed, a bit embarrassed. And then: "Oh, father! Will you please come here?"

There had been a rather perfunctory introduction such as might have occurred among any travelers abroad cast together momentarily by some trifling incident. And that was all—for the moment. Tyrone had bowed and amplified his daughter's thanks. Buckhannon had bowed and repeated that it was nothing. Méliissine had smiled and taken her father's arm. Buckhannon had remained standing there. The Tyrones had moved away.

Full three days before Buckhannon saw the Tyrones again—days full of agony, nights that were sleepless or haunted with nightmare. Yet this blackness shot through with gleams of gold—when he told himself that to love a girl like this, though she be a Lilith, or a vampire, or a Lorelei, would make him a knight and a troubadour.

Who was she?

To Paradise

What was she?

What was wrong?

All sorts of old foolish statements kept ringing in his brain, like "Where there's smoke there's fire," and the druggist's "Maybe it was his wife," and the policeman's "'Tis the soul of old man Tyrone that ought to be runnin' to and fro.'"

Then, one afternoon Buckhannon had dropped over for his hundredth visit to Notre Dame. First he had stood there in the open square looking up at its old façade. He was moved to speech:

"Let little man squirm and argue as he will and let him in his heart say there is no God; or, for the matter of that, let him curse God and die, if he wants to; old Notre Dame understands. They have said bad things about you, Notre Dame. You also have been a house with a bad name. But there you are, serene and beautiful and everlasting!"

Thus having purified himself, so to speak, he entered the one of the three doors that was open. It was dark inside—or it seemed so, as it always does to one who enters from the outer daylight. It was darkness which at first was only slightly relieved by the twinkle of candles—as of stars too small in a void too vast.

Then there was a slant of shadowy light from the heights above him, this light dissolving into the luminous blue dusk. It was a place of receding distances, the gleams, the depths, and the perspectives of which made these distances seem measureless.

He had the familiar sensation that here was a house

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not built with hands. He had the feeling that this was not a building constructed of lead and stone so much as it was a structure reared of the solid stuff of prayers and songs. This was the footstool of the Almighty. The Almighty was there—an Infinite Presence, a Thinker, nebulous but real and very great.

Then, without any conscious change, or without any conscious loss in his feeling of reverence, he was aware that he was contemplating another sort of presence. The thought even occurred to him in a glimpsing sort of way that even the Almighty at times has been known to assume a small and concrete form. Maybe it was something like that in the present instance. There, some distance ahead of him, almost in the exact center of the nave, he saw the figure of a girl.

She seemed to be a suppliant. She seemed to be at prayer. She was kneeling on a *prie-Dieu*—one of those cathedral chairs with a low seat and a high back. She was very graceful. She was dressed in white.

All this was in Buckhannon's first impression. Then he found himself pervaded by a slow, a tingling, a steadily mounting surge of emotion.

He had noticed that this fair suppliant also had a crown of fine gold hair; that she was wearing the same sort of clothes that Miss Tyrone would have worn. Still, the thing seemed too good to be true. He felt as one might feel who had possibly hoped for a miracle, but hadn't dared to ask for it, and had suddenly found that he had been granted the miracle none the less.

But he went forward up the center of the nave. There

To Paradise

was no one else there. It was as if he and this other had the cathedral to themselves, had the world to themselves, had the universe to themselves, had all time, all space.

There was a vacant *prie-Dieu* at the fair suppliant's side. Tremulous, Buckhannon knelt there. He looked at the girl. He had known it. There had been no doubt. It was Mélissine.

She gave him a slightly startled glance. Their eyes met. He did not smile. Nor did she. There was no levity in either of them. So far as Buckhannon was concerned he had never felt so solemn in his life. There was that in Mélissine's face to indicate that it was the same with her.

For a moment she had turned her face straight forward again, looking up. She closed her eyes. Her dark eyelashes were very soft and fine. They rested on the greater softness and fineness of her skin, while this took on the faintest tinge of added color.

Her white throat swelled a little. And not until then was there even a hint of a smile on her lips. If Mélissine could have been translated into a song just then, the words of it would have been: "Oh, joy divine!"

Then she opened her eyes again and slowly looked at Buckhannon. He had been watching her with a rapt and fearful attentiveness—his own lips closed tight, his breast heaving.

For a measureless time now they were looking into each other's eyes. It was the final clearing up of the clouds and the vapors incident to this new Day of Creation.

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Buckhannon, no longer fearful of anything, and still just as reverent as he had been, put out his hand and let it rest on one of Méliissine's hands. It was smooth and soft and yet it was strong, that hand of Méliissine's. He could tell that, even before she turned it over so that the back of it was resting on the back of the *prie-Dieu* and her fingers were closing over his own.

"Eugene," she breathed.

He had told her his first name.

"Méliissine," he breathed.

He had heard her father call her that.

Their language, such as it was, consisted of mere breaths and wordless telepathies.

"Do you know what I was praying for?" asked Méliissine.

"Yes—no."

"I was praying—that we might find each other again."

He bowed his head over her hand. He held her hand for a long, long time to his lips. And neither of them noticed that shadowy figure of a man who had come up and was standing there just at the side of them.

The newcomer made as if to speak. He put out a hand as if to touch the girl. He hesitated. He drew back.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW QUASIMODO

THE other day when Nathan Tyrone had seen this youth speak to his daughter in the Gardens of the Luxembourg, it hadn't occurred to him that anything of importance had happened. There had been no premonition. There had been no misgivings afterward. Apparently everything had been as it had been before. So he had felt. So he had believed.

If anything, his spirit had attained to even some higher level of happiness. There had been a new tenderness about Mélissine, also a new beauty.

Tyrone surveyed all this in the first hasty glance of his mind as he stood there now. He was like a man who had received a bolt in his chest in the course of a promenade on a tranquil afternoon, and who turns and looks about him over the sunlit landscape, aware that he has received his death wound and wondering whence it came.

What met his mental vision was that thing he had seen in the park—the marble basin where the children had been sailing their yachts. He saw the one particularly gorgeous craft—the one with the tall white sail and crimson hull—the one that had been capsized by that gentle breath of air. Such a gentle breath of air—tepid,

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smelling of geraniums! And he had likened it to the dream-craft of some older person.

Hadn't the thing been a sign for himself? Absurd! The thing could not be. He put out his hand and had almost touched MéliSSine's shoulder, but a palsy took him and he drew his hand away.

He took a survey of nearer incidents. To-day he hadn't been feeling so well. MéliSSine had been all devoted attention for him just as her mother would have been—had made him a pot of camomile after their stroll along the Seine. He had intended taking a nap. It was he who had suggested that she go over to Notre Dame. She loved the cathedral as much as he did. It wasn't very far away. But he had found the loneliness unbearable. It was always like that when MéliSSine was away from him for any length of time.

She was all he had. She was all he loved. She was all that held him to this earth.

But he had his premonition now.

It was when he started to pronounce her name and his voice failed him. He hadn't been able to get out a syllable.

There knelt MéliSSine. There knelt this young man named Buckhannon. And the young man had taken MéliSSine's hand. She had let him. She had let him bring her fingers to his lips.

Tyrone's breast began to heave.

Even yet he was perhaps unaware of the magnitude of this thing that had befallen him. But he was torn by some agony of grief such as he had believed he would

The New Quasimodo

never know again. There may have been a jealousy in this. There certainly was a sense of deprivation—a feeling that he was no longer essential to the life and the movement of the world.

For the first time in her life Mélissine had failed to respond to his presence. She had always been very sensitive in this respect. She had always seemed to know. If he came into a room where she was, her eyes had been on the door. Had she been reading a book, his approach had always been more interesting than the story.

A slow rage came into Tyrone's heart. It beat there like the waves on the shore of a channel after a large ship has gone by. Something had passed by in the channel of his heart. Something was leaving him—leaving him forever.

The music of the organ penetrated his consciousness.

He had been a Latinist in his day. He caught the words of a chant: "*Miserere mei, Domine!*" "Have mercy upon me, O Lord!"

All the pride and the strength of the long line of the Tyrones was in him, but his heart responded to that old cry. He whispered it to himself. And he who had been stricken to the heart because Mélissine had not turned to look at him was now afraid that she would.

He drew back a step. He stood there dazed.

"*Non est in morte.*" "For in death there is no remembrance of Thee."

Tyrone turned. He faltered. He did not see very clearly. But he wanted to get away. He wanted to

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think. He wanted to find out the mystery of this new thing that had befallen him.

There came into his thought smoky memories of Victor Hugo's story of Notre Dame—the vaporous presence of *Quasimodo*, the hunchback, who had loved the *Esmeralda*; and the memory became a parody of himself and *Mélinesse*. He was the hunchback. He was old and deformed and despised of the world, and he had loved this creature of another order of creation.

The cathedral was a gallery of whispers—Latin mostly, sometimes murmured, sometimes intoned—but each whisper was a message for him out of the crystallized experience of a suffering world: "*And being in agony He prayed more earnestly.*" Tyrone pursued the quotation through his groping mind: "*And His sweat was as it were great drops of blood.*"

While all this was going on there had drawn up in front of Notre Dame a shabby little open hearse followed by a dismal little procession of a few poor people dressed in black. The coffin was nothing but a pine box covered by a black cloth hired for the occasion. They were paying the last honors to some one who must have been the poorest of the poor.

Yet, nevertheless, they carried him into this temple which had witnessed the funerals of cardinals and kings. They bore him to one of the chapels near the great altar. For him the organ rolled, the Psalmist of old Israel was heard again: "*I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.*"

So the dead man may have been singing in his sleep.

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And Nathan Tyrone—not physically stumbling, precisely, yet stumbling all the same—came to a faltering stop at the chapel where the funeral was in progress. That was himself lying there. He put out a hand and touched a pillar that had been polished by many another hand that had groped in pain. He slid to his knees.

He had no more control over himself—so he felt—than if he himself had been lying there, the silent hero of all this ancient pomp. Internally he was sobbing. Outwardly he was calm. Gradually he was the center of a small silence. It was as if this silence emanated from himself—from his hushed heart outward into space—a stillness whence anything might emerge. This stillness, this hush, was penetrated through by a slow, low-pitched throb that was lingering and tonal, but was scarcely sound.

Again there was the hush. Again that tonal shake in the stillness. It was as if the cathedral itself were sobbing internally with him and for him.

Then he recognized the sound. They were tolling the bell for the dead—one of the great bells in the high square tower. The tower was gray as he was gray, and this was the voice in it. So it had tolled when his bride was dead. So had it tolled generation after generation. And he had thought to conquer death! He in his feebleness had thought to cheat death by making a counterfeit of life and calling it life itself!

He abased himself. Then he was forgetting himself altogether. A voice so clear and sweet it might have been Méliissine's own had begun to sing "O Blessed Light!"

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And a light was struggling with the darkness in Tyrone's inner self.

"Lord! Lord!" he cried in silence. "May she be happy! May this new love—this only love that she has ever known—be a holy light for her!"

Tyrone yearned more deeply still as he thought of the youth he had seen at his daughter's side. He said:

"Him also bless that he be worthy!"

Buckhannon and Mélissine had also become aware that there was music about them. It was as if fiat were following fiat in some new order of creation:

"Let there be light!"

"Let there be love!"

"Let there be song!"

"Let there be incense!"

Out of the void all these things had come.

This wasn't the Garden of Eden they were in. This was Paradise itself.

They made a round of the church. Tyrone saw them pass. He was still kneeling at the side of the pillar. They hadn't noticed him.

It was sunset by the time that Buckhannon and Mélissine came out into the square—the ancient *Parvis* which must have been saturated deep with blood and tears. But the young people could see nothing but beauty. The western sky lay ahead of them. It was flaming with melted gold. The gold vapor out of that great crucible filled the air. It overflowed into the Seine. It coated the very asphalt, so that it was not asphalt

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over which they walked but a cloth of gold spread there in honor of this day.

Méïissine raised her eyes to Buckhannon's with a modesty that was all the greater in that she was so glad.

He himself was exalted.

The great bell in the cathedral tower was still tolling, but it tolled in vain. There was no more mourning in the world.

They followed the Seine. They came to the door of that obscure hotel on the Quai des Orfèvres. The spirits of dead goldsmiths had plenty of raw material to work with this night. Nevertheless it would have seemed strange to persons less possessed that a man of Tyrone's standing in the world should have come with his daughter to seek lodgment in a place like this. It all seemed natural and right to Buckhannon, though. Any other girl than Méïissine might have apologized, might have explained. Not she.

The only thing that occurred to Buckhannon was that Fate with a continuance of her matchless generosity had now revealed to him Méïissine's address. Hereafter there would be no more heart-breaking vigils on the Pont Neuf. The only thing that occurred to Méïissine was that now had come the moment for adieu.

The hotel was one of those with its first floor given over to a shop, the office of the hotel being one flight up. The hallway was deep and narrow. It was sheltered from the vulgar scrutiny of the street by a curtained doorway. Through the doorway Buckhannon followed Méïissine.

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And there they paused, looking into each other's eyes.

"Good-by," she whispered.

Her eyes were sober, but there was a lingering suggestion of the flaming sunset in both her eyes and her face.

"Good-by," he breathed.

She stood perfectly submissive like a little girl—and the world stood still—as he leaned forward, sacredly, and touched her forehead with his lips.

CHAPTER XV

THE STRANGE WOMAN

SOMETHING of all this—of the joy of life, and of the hope that springs eternal, and of the glory everlasting—was reflected in No. 6 Cinnamon Street.

The autumn deepened. The trees in the chapel yard next door shed their leaves—just as the trees in the Luxembourg Gardens shed theirs. The first cold winds and drizzles were succeeded both in Paris and New York by the melancholy glow of an Indian summer. Winter came. But the love story that made Paris indifferent to the seasons also had its counterpart in old No. 6.

Since the Tyrones went away Mr. Partridge had continued to live there alone—as much as any old man is ever alone. And the butler was rather the type to find society in ghosts than even most old men are so inclined.

He had the family portraits to keep him company. Keep him company they did. They had their eyes upon him as he pottered about the darkened house at his various occupations. He had plenty to do. He was keeping the house in perfect order.

And Mélissine was there. First of all, she smiled at him every time he came into the music-room—from her

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balcony over the fireplace, demure and sympathetic, infused with a latent fire. Often at night old Partridge would light the candles that illuminated La Tour's portrait and light no others. Then Partridge would bring down from up-stairs a flute of his own—a flute he had learned to play in the days of his youth in emulation of his earlier master. And Partridge would play tune after tune to the great delight of the lady hanging on the wall: "How Can I Leave Thee?" "Nancy Lee," "Old Black Joe," "Silver Threads Among the Gold," "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes."

And after this concert for two he would elaborately blow his nose and touch his eyes and do a little reverence to the dear dead Mlle. de la Vallière of the eighteenth century. Then one by one he would extinguish the tapers and retire for the night.

A man of fine sentiment—of very fine sentiment. A young tree is beautiful, but an old tree may be more beautiful still.

But most of all was Mélissine present in spirit when Partridge consulted a certain calendar she had given him—"to remember me by"—just before her going away. It was called a "Scripture Text Calendar," with "Thoughts for Daily Meditation." He had the calendar hanging on the wall of his small bedroom at the top of the house.

"Let's see! This is the twenty-sixth!"

And he would adjust his glasses and turn his head at the proper angle for reading, all this with a pleasur-

The Strange Woman

able quaver of anticipation. And he would find something like this:

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

This always did good to Partridge.

He had a way of saying to himself: "Old men need such food as that. It is strengthening."

And he would meditate the meaning of the text all day, and continue to draw nourishment from it, ever with an underglow of gratitude for Mélissine. He would often say to himself: "It is good to have young people in the world."

Every time he thought of Mélissine it was as if he heard a transcript—with words and music—of that old hymn that had brought dawn out of darkness to Nathan Tyrone as he knelt there in Notre Dame:

"O lux Beata—O Blessed Light!"

He clung to this light because he knew as well as any one could have known that there were days of darkness ahead when some such light would be necessary else the whole world should go down in gloom. Old men know such things better than any one else—old men and old women; and Partridge was something of both, he had seen so much, reflected so much. Moreover, he had all the delicacy of a woman, both inside and out, as he thought and thought and went about his housework.

The house continued to be merely the house with a bad name, though, for those who looked at it from the outside. It was a ghostly old place in the haunted In-

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dian summer when the dead leaves were gusting about the tombstones next door. There were times when the trees seemed to talk to each other—first one of them sending down a drift of leaves, then another one sending down a similar drift as if in answer. And it was always very silent in Cinnamon Street when these interchanges took place.

Old Goodenough continued to come and go.

Hickcock found Goodenough staring through the pickets of the chapel yard one night.

"And why do you stare like that, Goodenough?" the policeman inquired.

Goodenough turned and contemplated his friend for a long time and made no answer except for the answer that might have been read in the haggard gloom of his vinous old face.

"Were you ever in love?" inquired Goodenough in turn. "I ask you, Hickcock, did you ever know the love of woman?"

Said Hickcock: "Me and my old woman have been married now for forty years."

"Answer my question," said Goodenough.

"I did."

"Tut! Tut!" said Goodenough. "Love is a hunger. Men don't love what they've got but what they've not."

"You dirty old rascal!" said Hickcock playfully. "Well, neither of us is as young as we used to be." He had a second thought. "At that, though," he said, "there's many a dame who would fall for me uniform. Ask any cop. What was you startin' out to say?"

The Strange Woman

"Once I was handsome," Goodenough affirmed with remorse. "This nose wasn't always swelled up and blue. Once I had all my teeth. You wouldn't believe it, to look at this cheek—all wrinkled and stubbly gray—that a woman should have touched it with the fingers of love."

"Sure I would," said Hickcock. "I've seen many an old rummy—and him not in uniform, neither—cut out a good one."

"And now she is dead," Goodenough pursued, without heeding the interruption; "and the best part of me is dead—as with all old men—who die like old trees, branch by branch, hope by hope."

"What happened to her?" Hickcock demanded. His thoughts always lagged behind when Goodenough talked.

"She went to the dogs," said Goodenough, "and I helped to send her there."

"How long ago was that?"

"Full thirty years ago." Goodenough looked at his friend. His next statement came like a quotation from one of those poems he loved. "She used to walk in the graveyard here, and we were young together."

Hickcock turned, cautiously, and looked toward No. 6. There was a dim light in one of the upper windows. Then Hickcock saw the black shadow of a woman's shape slant across the street toward No. 6 from the direction of the drug-store.

"Look-it!" he cried. "There's that queer Jane comin' back—the same you knocked on the door for that other time."

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"She was like a ghost——"

"Fergit it!" said the policeman. "I bet she's got a date with that lousy old hypocrite up there." He indicated the dim light at Partridge's window. "Lay low, and you'll see him come down and let her in."

There is always a mystery about a light burning dimly in a house late at night. Some one revels. Some one mourns. Some one does his bit of creation that may change the face of the world. But as often as not, if the truth be known, some one is up there calling on the Lord for help.

It was that way with Partridge now in this room he called his own—a small chaste room, very plain but perfectly kept. It was lit by a single candle. And Partridge, still fully dressed except that he had laid aside his coat, and thus quite the picture of the old gentleman despite the fact that he was nothing but a butler, had knelt at the side of his narrow bed.

He was praying hard.

"Grant that neither of them find it out, O Lord," he labored. "And her—move her heart to make it pure and——"

Here he stopped short. The dead silence of the house had been shattered by a light staccato rapping from the direction of the lower hall. Some one was knocking at the door.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WOLF COMES OUT

IT is to be doubted that Partridge would have done otherwise even if he had known who it was down there. He may even have suspected who it was. He was a bit nervous as he got into his coat. The candle flickered and flared in his hand. There was another knock and yet another before he got to the bottom of the lower flight, and his nervousness increased. But this may have been merely from the distress that he felt at having caused a caller at the Tyrone house to wait so long.

Arrived at the bottom of the stairs he set the candle on the console. He straightened his coat. He hastily unlocked the door and opened it.

No, he could scarcely have expected this caller after all.

"Mme. Jenesco," he began. He had intended to make his voice sound authoritative but instead it faltered.

The caller he had addressed as Mme. Jenesco brushed past him. It was the woman who had told Buckhannon her name was Belle. Into the hall she had brought something of chill, also of dampness, also of that faunal taint of musk.

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"Shut the door," she said. "It's beginning to snow."

Partridge did not instantly shut the door—not altogether; just enough to keep the draught from the candle and also to keep any one who happened to be passing from looking in. He stood with his hand on the knob. He looked at the woman with a distracted face.

"I warned you—I begged you," he said, "not to come here again."

"You should worry," she said. "The family's not here."

"It is late."

"Late!" she laughed. "The night's young yet. It's only ten."

There was nothing particularly brutal about all this, in spite of the coarseness of her speech and the way she had forced her way into the house. She was inclined to smile upon Partridge, treat him with a degree of good-natured contempt.

"May I ask you to state——"

"—what I came for? You ought to be able to guess."

"If it's money——"

"You said it. I want money. I'm tired of living on air."

"Madam——"

"I haven't any objection to sitting down," said Belle, and she seated herself. She made a striking but sinister picture there in the candle-flare, surrounded by deep shadows. She was dressed in black. Her face appeared to be very white, her lips very red, her eyes

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abnormally dark. She seemed to be a little thinner. This may have been mere imagination, but there appeared also to be a wolflike line of hunger and appetite in the contour of her cheek.

"Your regular allowance was sent you at the first of the month," Partridge affirmed. He was stifling his reproach, but he was greatly distressed.

"A rotten hundred dollars!" she scorned. "Go ahead and shut the door. No use advertising our family troubles to the whole neighborhood."

Partridge shut the door. But he stiffened.

"Madam," he said, "I should not be forced to remind you that you are a recipient of charity, and that this charity is most generous."

Mme. Jenesco lost some of her smiling indifference.

"I want another hundred," she said; "and I want it now."

"You cannot have it."

"Not so fast! I didn't come here to beg. I didn't come here to get insulted either. It would help me a lot if you offered me a glass of wine or something. I got a chill. I feel feverish."

Partridge wavered.

"I am very sorry if you are ill, but you must see how irregular this is. I—I really must ask you to transact your further business through Judge Bancroft. I keep no funds here in the house."

"You came across easily enough that other time."

"That was when the family was here."

"And what has Judge Bancroft got to do with it?"

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"He is, I may say, the family lawyer."

"Oh! So that's it! Lawyer! Why didn't I ever think of that myself! Say, I bet I could get one of those little shysters who hang around the Criminal Courts Building who'd make you come across. What are you shaking so much about? Are you going to give me that glass of wine? I need it."

Partridge, sure enough, had begun to shake at Mme. Jenesco's mention of a lawyer. He had tried to protest. All he could do was to lift a hand. The hand trembled. She saw that she had won some sort of a triumph. She was almost amiable again.

"Come on," she said; "I'll carry the candle for you."

"I must beg you to leave," said Partridge.

"I don't intend to leave."

"I must order you to."

"And if I don't."

"There's an officer in the street——"

Mme. Jenesco, who had risen, came a little closer to Partridge, looked at him from the corners of her eyes, and smiled for a moment without saying a word.

"All right," she said, softly. "Go as far as you want. Do you suppose I don't know that there's some secret about this house that you don't want advertised? Do you suppose I'm not next to the stories that all your neighbors tell about this place? Do you suppose I didn't hear certain things from my mother? Do you suppose that I don't know you're holding out something on Mr. Tyrone?" She waited for perhaps a half-dozen seconds—just long enough to see that each of her ques-

The Wolf Comes Out

tions had been a shot and that each shot had gone home. "It's really that I wanted to talk to you about," she said with a change of tone. "Come on; we can talk better after we've had something to drink."

Partridge, shaken—too shaken for thought, and also, perhaps, obedient to the habits of a lifetime—picked up the candle and led the way back through the hall. He was so shaken that his step could have been described as tottering. But there was a degree of formality, even so, in the way he ushered Mme. Jenesco into the room where Judge Bancroft had been entertained. There he lit more candles, as he had done on that former occasion. With a murmured word of apology he withdrew—leaving Mme. Jenesco to look about her at the twilight, impressive richness of the place.

Partridge was long—so long that Mme. Jenesco became a bit suspicious. With her feline speed and softness she went to the door through which Partridge had disappeared. She peered. She listened. Then, satisfied, she came back and seated herself in the chair that had been Tyrone's on the night the judge was there. And at her, also, the old portraits looked down grimly, but she was as indifferent to their staring as a cat would have been.

"I'm glad you didn't pull the cork till you got here," she smiled, when Partridge had at last returned. He merely gave her a troubled look. "I'm not sure yet you haven't slipped some dope in it," she explained. "I suppose it'd break you all up if I was to die!"

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Partridge did not speak until he had decanted a glass of the red wine. He poured none for himself.

"I wish you no ill, madam," he said, soberly. "What was it you wished to propose?"

Mme. Jenesco sipped her wine guardedly to make sure that it was good. It stood the test. She emptied her glass and passed it back to be refilled.

"I was wondering," she said, "why you and I shouldn't get together right."

CHAPTER XVII

OF BLOOD AND GOLD

GET together, madam?" queried Partridge, with cold dignity. "I—I don't understand."

"There's no use making bones about it," said Mme. Jenesco, reaching for the glass that Partridge had scarcely had the time to fill; "when the druggist across the street told me that Tyrone and the little blonde had gone away and left you here all alone it made me feel real sore."

Partridge waited. His silence was rather trying for the caller.

"Sit down," she urged. "You don't have to be so stiff with me. Why don't you pour a glass of wine for yourself? It'll do you good. This place's about as cheerful as a morgue."

"I beg pardon, madam; but——"

"Oh, cut it; come on; be friendly."

"You were about to say——"

"Well, why should they be off enjoying themselves, and seeing all the sights, when you and I haven't got anything? For that matter, why should they have a house like this, and put on such airs——"

"I cannot discuss, madam, subjects that concern my master alone."

The House With a Bad Name

"Your master!"

"My master, madam."

"You seem to be proud of him."

"I am—I have always been—proud——"

"Were you proud of him when he killed his own father?"

"That is a damnable, a most preposterous lie."

"Oh, it is! And I suppose it's a lie that they buried a woman from this house—a woman that had been kept here in secret!"

Partridge closed his eyes the better to get a grip on himself. Maybe he was fishing into his thought for some sustaining text from MéliSSine's calendar. A moment later he looked as if this might have been the case, and his voice supported the theory, too, when he spoke.

"Madam," he said gently, "I am aware of the wicked gossip that has afflicted us for so many years. It all had its origin—all our troubles had their origin—with this woman who, as you state, had been kept here in secret. The woman was—your mother. She was brought here sick; she was dying. I suppose that we should not blame outsiders for imputing evil to Mr. Nathan Tyrone's kind act when his own father failed to comprehend it. Indeed, it was this misapprehension on the elder Mr. Tyrone's part that hastened his end."

"But that burial at night," said Belle, partly persuaded.

"Not at night, but at twilight," said Partridge; and, forgetful of his dignity, he touched his eyes with his

Of Blood and Gold

handkerchief and blew his nose. "That was the hour at which the elder Mr. Tyrone wished to be buried—as his father had been buried before him—whom I also served."

"Well, there's something wrong, somewhere."

"I—I deny it."

Mme. Jenesco laughed softly, sipped her wine. Partridge's eyes were fugitive, as one might say. Hers were bold.

"Then, why," she asked lightly, "are you always so scared when I threaten to come here and speak to Mr. Tyrone? Why were you so leary just now when I talked about calling in a lawyer? I could see right away that you had made a bad break—and you knew it, too!—when you pulled that bluff about me seeing Judge Bancroft. I bet I could hire a lawyer that'd have Judge Bancroft himself running for cover, too. I know some of these heavy respectables. I bet a clever lawyer could hang something on every last one of 'em—enough to send 'em all to jail."

"Is there anything else?" asked Partridge.

"You haven't heard yet what my proposition is," said Mme. Jenesco. She had been taking her time about studying Partridge. She was increasingly sure of herself. "Just how much have you made—all these years you've been serving these extra fine people?" she asked.

"I am a poor man," Partridge hastily replied.

"A poor goat," said Mme. Jenesco. "Here you've been slaving for them for God knows how long; and you're still poor, and they're rich."

"Their fortune is limited."

The House With a Bad Name

"How much?"

"I have—I cannot——"

"Don't be a fool," said Mme. Jenesco. "You write all the checks. I was cashing mine in the bank one day when you came in. I saw you draw out a roll that'd 've choked a horse. Why don't you take some of this money and make your getaway? Why don't *you* go on a trip to Europe? Listen! You and me! We could go down to Palm Beach together. I'm sick of this rotten town. You're young yet——"

"My God, madam!" Partridge exploded.

"Take a glass of wine; it'll brace you up."

"Will you please go?"

Mme. Jenesco was not offended. She got to her feet—slowly, with a sort of writhing grace. But instead of taking the direction of the door she came to Partridge's side.

"Why *should* I go, on a night like this?" she asked, softly. "It's cold and wet outside. I live a mile from here. The streets in this part of town are enough to frighten a second-story man. And I suppose you know that my husband died last month in San Francisco."

"You have my sympathy," said Partridge in a strained voice.

"You needn't feel any worse about it than I do," she replied, in her most lulling voice. "He was no good. My real reason for seeing you to-night was that I was feeling lonely."

Partridge did not move from her so much as, it appeared, he shrank into himself.

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"I will ask you to listen to me," he said.

"I'm listening."

"I have served the Tyrones from boyhood. I am going to serve them still."

"Have your own way."

"But you may remain here if you wish—as your mother did—before you were born. You may even sleep in her bed, if you care to. No one has slept in it since. I've kept it pretty much as she left it. Would you like to see it?"

"That kind of stuff wouldn't worry me," said Belle; "not if the room was aired." Then her mouth went bitter. "I came here to-night in need," she said impulsively, "and looking for a friend—the only place I had to turn to in New York." There was an involuntary sob in her voice. "And this is the sort of treatment I get!"

Partridge melted.

"I didn't know—I thought——"

"Because I had to have a little money! But I know where I can get it—out in the streets!"

"No, no!" said Partridge. "There!—for the sake of kind Heaven, madam!" He went over to a panel of woodwork at the side of the fireplace and there, by a manipulation that Belle could not follow, revealed a safe built into the wall. He opened this quite carelessly and took out a number of bills. "Take these," he said, coming back to Belle; "and God see you safely home!"

Belle's inscrutable eyes met his. Without shifting her gaze she put the money into some hiding-place of her

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own. The bitterness had left her mouth. She slowly smiled.

"You're a good old soul," she said, with just a hint of friendly mockery. "But I'll not forget this night, and I don't think you will, either. You and I are going to see each other again."

Up in his room, long, long after the woman was gone, Partridge sought relief in prayer again. But no great relief was to be had. He was distrait. He couldn't concentrate. All that he could say was to repeat over and over again what he had already started to say earlier in the night:

"Grant that neither of them find it out! Move her heart—to make it pure and gentle!"

There could have been no doubt that the first part of this petition referred to the master and mistress of the house; nor that the second part of it referred to her who now walked away, through the damp snow, slowly and unafraid—thinking, thinking—toward her own abode.

Belle Jenesco had plenty to think about. A vague ambition was revolving in her mind—revolving with such flashes of bright possibility that it made her dizzy almost. Here a man accosted her. She dismissed him with a look. An old beggar whined at her from a doorstep. She stopped and gave him a coin—"For luck!" she told herself. She wondered what *was* that secret that Partridge guarded. She began to guess. She was not with-

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out intuition—not without imagination—not without, most of all, a stark and naked knowledge of sex.

The winter deepened. The snow came. The sounds of the great city were more muffled than ever. More than ever was Cinnamon Street sequestered. More than ever was No. 6 a container of mysterious life, frozen now, but whence weird flowers might blossom in the spring.

CHAPTER XVIII

WEIRD BLOSSOMS

THERE were weird blossoms enough already inside of No. 6—as the flowers may be supposed to exist already in the heart of the frost-bound rose-bush. It was a haunted garden, so to speak, through which might walk almost any sort of specter.

Tyrone had come back with his daughter from Paris. Tyrone had fallen into a sort of lethargy. He who had always been 'so indifferent to the world was now more indifferent than ever—to the actual world, that is. And he who had always lived in a world of his own fashioning—ever since he was a young man painting pictures in the graveyard next door and attending spirit worship in the abandoned chapel—now lived altogether in such a world. It was a world all his own. It was a world that had but the vaguest *rapport* with the world in general.

And this world was the garden wherein the weird blossoms grew. It was the world of his mind.

"Partridge!"

"Yes, sir; I am here, sir!"

The master of No. 6 was seated in his music-room—the room he favored most because of the portrait that

Weird Blossoms

hung over the fireplace. He was seated before the fireplace. He lounged there rather—limp and graceful. He wore his velvet coat and his flowing tie. His hair was long and wavily disheveled. The firelight rose and fell. At times this made of him a picture of shadowy depression. At times it made him a picture of Satanic life.

"Is it not almost Christmas, Partridge?"

"This is the nineteenth, sir."

Partridge kept track of dates. No day went past now but that he consulted Méliissine's calendar. The motto for this day had been: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." And a supplemental whisper had come to Partridge: "Be faithful unto the death of Mr. Tyrone, for Mr. Tyrone is not long for this earth."

"The nineteenth," said Tyrone. "I shall have to be looking to my charity."

"I have been sending the usual remittance, sir," Partridge said with an undoubted nervousness.

"How much was that?"

"One hundred dollars a month, sir."

Tyrone reflected.

"I think that I shall give her a year's allowance in advance."

"That would be a great deal of money, sir."

"The estate will bear it?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"And after I am dead—and Méliissine has everything—perhaps circumstances will arise that will prevent future payments."

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Partridge clasped his hands. He unclasped them. He was standing where Tyrone could not see his face. He glanced up at the portrait above the fireplace. The lady up there smiled at him deliciously. Somehow this encouraged Partridge. It was as if he were taking her part against the Woman in Black.

"You will pardon me, sir, if I venture to make a suggestion."

"I know what it will be," droned Tyrone. "I know what you're going to say, Partridge. You're going to say that the creature has no claim upon me and that this continual gift of money will cause talk."

"Not quite that, sir."

"Yes it is. I know your thought. And I remember what you said when I brought that unfortunate home with me—— How long ago was it? Thirty years! Thirty years ago, come Christmas! I found her drunk or drugged in the snow. Remember?"

"I remember, sir."

"Remember how you helped me to smuggle her into one of the vacant rooms up-stairs, and care for her there, and feed her, without my father knowing anything about it?"

"Oh, yes, sir! And how you took all the blame—when your father did find out."

"Blame! There was no blame! There was a misunderstanding! Men have been blamed for many things in this world that will win them the congratulations of the angels. How long ago did she die?"

"It was fifteen years ago, sir."

Weird Blossoms

"That's right. And we've been keeping up the payments to her daughter?"

"Yes, sir. It was as you directed."

"She must be quite a big girl now."

"She is a woman of—thirty, sir."

"Ever see her?"

"I have, sir."

"A good woman?"

"I hardly know——"

Tyrone laughed mournfully. While Partridge still stood there back of him clasping and unclasping his hands, Tyrone let his attention revert to the portrait above the fireplace.

"It is odd," said Tyrone, softly, as he looked up at her, "that I should have clung to life as if it were sweet when only in death is there sweetness. Love is sweet. But love is nothing but the prelude to death.

"I dreamed last night that I was in a thick garden of poppies, and the poppies grew so lush and thick that they swooned of their own fragrance, and she was there, and so was I, and that was death. Oh, Partridge!"

"I am here, sir."

"Did you ever love a woman, Partridge?"

"I suppose you may say, sir"—and Partridge, nervous, had also let his old eyes lift to the portrait over the mantelpiece—"that I did, sir."

"Was she beautiful, Partridge?"

"She was, sir."

"And is she still living, Partridge?"

"She's dead, sir."

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"More and more," said Tyrone, drifting back into his musings; "more and more, it is the dead who call to the quick, the quick who respond to the dead. It is the dead girl who calls to her lover—he who has remained on earth and is growing old and is thought to have out-lived romance. It is the dead lover, young and fair, who calls to the aging matron. Now I am old, but she whom I love is young and fair——"

One would have said that his soliloquy had served as an incantation. The door had softly opened. Into the dusk of the room there had come a vision of the spirit to whom Tyrone had called—young and fair, clad in the garments of another generation.

It was Méliissine.

There was a lace cap on her head. She wore a light-blue sack, soft and loose, of silk, richly laced, and embroidered with countless little flowers and garlands that ran through the whole gamut of colors from black to white. Under the sack was one of those diaphanous, classic one-piece robes, girdled high up, such as the painter David designed at the outbreak of the French Revolution. This was white. It clung and floated to her slightest curve and movement. It revealed that her pink feet wore nothing but light gold sandals.

Tyrone watched her enthralled. She raised her hand slightly in goodfellowship-greeting to Partridge. She kissed her father on the forehead, fondly, with the delicate concentration of a butterfly.

"And what has my darling been about this morning?" he asked.

Weird Blossoms

"I've sewed. I've embroidered." Did she suspect what ailed her father? She caressed him. "I've copied another ten pages of your beautiful poem."

"Oh, Partridge!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I think you may serve our luncheon here."

"Perfectly, sir."

And Partridge silently withdrew.

Partridge knew what it was that ailed Tyrone. Partridge had served three generations of Tyrones. He knew them as he would have known them had he been the mother of the race.

In the first place, Mélissine had told Partridge all about what had happened in France—what had happened to herself. She had met Eugene Buckhannon there. That was the sum and substance of it. In the second place, Partridge had understood perfectly what this had meant to Nathan Tyrone.

Tyrone had embarked on a spirit honeymoon with a spirit bride. He had seen a younger man come and claim this spirit-bride for his own. And of this Tyrone was dying.

"You will want other clothes," Tyrone had said.

He would never have suggested that to Mélissine before the voyage. Then Mélissine had not been the daughter. She had been the bride of twenty years ago come back to inhabit the earth—a bride who, herself, had already had that touch of unearthliness about her because of the eighteenth-century clothes she had preferred to wear. You get those old types in old civiliza-

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tions. Paris is full of types like that—disconcerting and sometimes beautiful characters straight out of the Middle Ages, even.

And Tyrone himself was the product of an older civilization of America. He came from a family that had clung to candles, for whom newspapers did not exist, who led cloistral lives, who mated with women who died young.

Tyrone should have been reading an illumined manuscript as he sat there in front of his fire.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LIGHT AND THE DARK

SO, one day when there was not very much snow in Cinnamon Street, Goodenough had come driving up to No. 6—with a closed cab, this time, instead of an open one—and those who watched saw Partridge come out of the door. They noticed that he was dressed for an excursion. This meant that he was muffled up. He wore an overcoat. This really suggested the better but old-fashioned name of “greatcoat”—it was so big and thick in every way. And Partridge carried a plug hat that was a genuine “beaver,” the nap of it was so thick and soft.

He was followed by the lady of the house (Mélissine), who might have suggested a little marquise to any one who knew about such things—with her tricorn hat, and her long dark cloak enveloping her from head to heel. But Tyrone did not appear.

It was Partridge himself who assisted his mistress down the stoop and through the door of the cab—while Goodenough, also muffled, held his whip aloft.

There had followed a brief colloquy that the watchers could not catch, although they tried hard enough to do so. But they could see that she who was in the cab

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was indicating that there was plenty of room there at her side. They could see that the old butler was protesting. And the butler apparently had his way. Finally he had climbed up to the seat at the side of Goodenough. And thus the equipage rolled away.

There were always mysterious happenings like that going on about No. 6.

Had they only known it—the watchers—this tour was more wonderful than they thought. It certainly was very wonderful for Mélissine. She was going shopping. She was not only going to buy some Christmas presents, she was going to buy all the clothing she wanted for herself. Everything that she saw and really wanted she could have.

Such had been her father's orders to Partridge when they were setting forth.

Goodenough knew the stores—the older and better ones. He drove them to store after store. The stores were crowded with Christmas shoppers. Sometimes the service wasn't very good—customers impatient, salespeople overworked; but Mélissine didn't mind—she was having the time of her life; and no one minded when Mélissine was served before her turn.

They wondered who she was. They looked after her, and as they did so they forgot that they were hurried and worried. She looked very beautiful and foreign. They could see how happy she was. She smiled at every one. But most of all she smiled at the old gentleman who accompanied her and insisted on carrying all the packages. They wondered who the old gentleman

The Light and the Dark

was. He must have been her grandfather. They seemed so devoted. And they must have been very rich, to judge from the money they spent. Nothing cost too much.

They had come into one of the largest and finest shops of all. It was very warm, and Méliissine tossed off her heavy cloak.

"Lined with sable," a woman whispered to another. "It must have cost a fortune."

"Look at her dress," said the other.

"Who can she be?"

"What a style! Is it something new?"

Méliissine had merely chosen one of the best winter dresses in her mother's trousseau. It was a dress she had always loved, yet one she had never worn before. Not even the dead, dear Mme. Tyrone could have worn it very often.

It was a heavy silk of dark blue—a very full skirt, a stiff bodice rather low at the throat where it was trimmed with a jeweled bar of Russian design. There were bands of sable fur across her shoulders, and nothing could have been more alluring than the contrast of this fur and Méliissine's nacre skin.

"Look at that designer sketching her sleeves," said one of the women.

"I don't blame him," said the other.

The sleeves were full to the elbow, where there was an undersleeve of old lace caught up in the angle of the elbow with a jewel.

Other designers were furtively following now—Irish,

The House With a Bad Name

French, and Russian Jew, artists all, responsive to an inspiration, wondering what nameless genius had robbed this girl.

"C'est magnifique!"

"She must be a Rooshin! Some creation!"

"Where did she get it? You can't buy silk like that any more."

Did Mélissine notice? Perhaps. She enjoyed it if she did. And of all the people whom she so obviously interested, one there was whom she apparently interested most of all. This was also a woman, and the woman herself was worthy of some note.

She was of a type that subtly suggested a wild animal; it was hard to tell just why. It was a little in the expression of her face—an expression that somehow meant that the owner of the face had a good appetite. There was an animal beauty in her face. There was an animal grace in the lines of her shape and in her sinuosities when she walked. But all this so subtle and unpronounced that the observation might have been as much of the imagination as of mere sight.

Mme. Jenesco!

Partridge had seen her and his heart was tripping. He went very rigid under the packages he carried.

It is doubtful if at first Mme. Jenesco had recognized the girl in the gorgeous dress. She had been impressed, as had the others, merely by Mélissine's general appearance. It may have struck her as interesting also that Mélissine should have been engaged in buying a gold cigarette-case. Mme. Jenesco herself had been engaged

The Light and the Dark

in looking over the stock of cigarette-cases. It was Méliissine's idea that such a bauble might serve as her present for Buckhannon.

"Is he rich or poor?" asked Partridge, when she had sought his advice.

"I don't know," said Méliissine. "I imagine that he's poor. He's a student and lives in the Latin Quarter."

"That would be rather elaborate for a poor young man," Partridge counseled gently. "Er—eh——"

Then Mme. Jenesco had seen who it was with Méliissine and she was no longer in any doubt at all who Méliissine was. Mme. Jenesco had given Partridge a gloating look, then had ignored him. There was a pleasure in the woman's face. But a psychologist perhaps would have said that it was a pleasure tinged with a killing desire. The killing desire deftly became the dawning purpose. She saw that Partridge was restless. She caught her breath. She shifted her position.

Mme. Jenesco had drawn so close to Méliissine that she was almost touching her. She seemed to take a certain luxury in this. She picked up another cigarette-case like the one that Méliissine had been admiring. She spoke to the saleswoman.

"How much is this?"

But even while she was not looking at Méliissine, one could see that every fiber of her was concentrated on contact with the girl at her side. She watched her chance and smoothly spoke to Méliissine.

"Everything is so dear!"

Méliissine gave her a brief smile. For a second their

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eyes met. There was a look in Mme. Jenesco's eyes that apparently startled Mélissine slightly, for she turned her smile swiftly to Partridge. Did she surprise that look of grim anguish in the old man's face? She glanced again at Mme. Jenesco.

"I don't know anything about prices," she said. "This is the first time that I've ever been shopping. Which one would you select?"

"Is it for yourself?" Mme. Jenesco asked.

Mélissine colored ever so slightly.

"It is for—a friend. He's in Paris. He's not coming home until the spring."

"How much can you spend?"

"As much as I wish, I suppose—anything within reason. That is what father said."

Partridge broke in. He cleared his throat. He spoke more roughly than he generally did: "I beg pardon, but we should be getting on!"

Mélissine turned sharply. Mme. Jenesco, breathing deeply, watched them go. She hesitated yet a moment longer. She started in pursuit.

CHAPTER XX

THE OVERHANGING CLOUD

SHE would dearly have loved to talk to Mélissine again. The girl filled her with curiosity and envy. But it was to Partridge she decided to speak. Through the crowds she followed them without the appearance of doing so. But a store-detective saw something in Mme. Jenesco's appearance that was odd and trailed her, in turn, for a little while. Not for long. Whatever she was, she was no shoplifter. With so much he was satisfied. All women were a little crazy at this time of the year. So the store-detective reflected. He had troubles enough of his own.

Mme. Jenesco followed Partridge and his lady to an upper floor where dresses were sold, and here Mme. Jenesco had her opportunity; for Mélissine was soon the center of a group of shopgirls, and Partridge, embarrassed and in need of rest, sat down in a secluded place to rest.

"How do you do?" came Mme. Jenesco's lulling voice. "Don't get up and don't get excited. I'll forgive you the look you gave me down-stairs. Why didn't you introduce me?"

Partridge cast anguished eyes in the direction that Mélissine had taken.

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"Don't alarm yourself," said Belle. "She's gone into one of the fitting-rooms. I saw her. She's good for half an hour, with that bunch around her, and the clothes she already had on." She calmly pulled a chair closer to the one Partridge occupied. "Stay where you are, I tell you. I'm not going to give you the small-pox."

"This unwarranted——"

He choked up so that he couldn't go on.

Mme. Jenesco spent the next few moments examining the cloak that Mélissine had allowed Partridge to carry.

"It's worth more than I'll ever get," she pronounced, with no great spleen. "Just look at the old rag I have to wear."

Partridge saw what he considered a chance. "You are very well dressed, indeed," he assured her.

"Yes, I am not," she replied, with her customary nonchalance. "But I'm going to be better dressed. I decided on that when I saw the way you were spending money, down there—you and the little blonde. What's her name?"

"You are referring to Miss Tyrone."

"Miss Tyrone!" She laughed lightly. "That's what I might have thought, myself, until I saw her—saw the things she had on, heard her make that break about spending as much as she wanted to. I might have guessed."

"Guessed what?"

"What are you trying to do?—pose as an innocent? Do men spend money like that on their *daughters*?—

The Overhanging Cloud

when they live in an old brick house down in Cinanmon Street?" Belle drew back from him slightly the better to laugh, but she was keeping her liquid eyes on him. She saw the old gentleman's nostrils expand, saw the flush that crept up under the shriveled pallor of his cheek. "Who's to blame if I feel a little sore?"

Partridge closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair. He remained silent.

"I've got a message I want you to take to Mr. Tyrone," said Belle; "and if you don't want to take it, why say so, and I'll take it myself."

Partridge spoke mournfully with his eyes still closed.

"Mr. Tyrone is very ill. Any disturbance might prove rapidly fatal."

"That's news," said Belle; "and who's going to inherit the family fortune? *Her*, I suppose."

"The fortune is limited."

"I know all about that, especially after this morning. But I'll break the good news to you, anyway. I want ten thousand dollars." She was glad that Partridge had his eyes closed. Like that he wouldn't know how closely she was watching him. And she didn't have to see his eyes. His face was as sensitive as the surface of a lake. But now Partridge slowly opened his eyes. He was almost unperturbed.

"When you signed your last receipt," he said, "you also signed an agreement that you had no claim whatsoever on either Mr. Tyrone or his daughter."

"Some of Judge Bancroft's work!"

The House With a Bad Name

"In any case, a paper to which you could take no exception."

"I love to hear you men talk," said Belle. "You're all alike. Grab everything you can so long as a woman's young, get her to sign a paper, and—good night! -I have half a notion, at that, to warn the little blonde. She's a silly little thing, but she has the looks, and I'm sure we'd like each other."

Partridge shuddered. Belle noticed his shudder but merely smiled. She reflected, not unhappily, for a space, then spoke aloud as if to herself:

"I wonder what the kid would think if I was to tell her."

Partridge was off his guard. "Tell her what?"

"Who I am!"

"Why should you——"

Mme. Jenesco gave Partridge her warmest smile. She was hastily preparing to leave. "I'm sorry I can't stay," she said. "There comes *Miss Tyrone!*" She was still smiling when she purred a threat: "But you get me that ten thousand, and get it quick—before the end of the month! Are you wise?—or I'll be around to the house to get it myself."

Partridge said nothing to Nathan Tyrone about this encounter in the store, although he was burning to do so. There were certain assurances that Partridge craved, one question most of all that had scare-crowded up in his brain. If he could only ask! If he could only

The Overhanging Cloud

ask! Several times Partridge was on the verge of doing so. But, after all, there was a limit to the things that servant could say to master and master say to servant, even when relations were such as theirs had always been.

And did Partridge have the right to ask this certain question in any case? Youth must be served. Let the dead past bury its dead! Judge not! Judge not!

What if Mr. Nathan had been guilty of an indiscretion in his youth?

Not that Partridge believed him to have been guilty! He ascribed to Tyrone that beautiful innocence that most mothers will, in spite of all, ascribe to their sons. But this wasn't the reason that Partridge could not come right out and ask Tyrone: "Was this woman's mother, or was she not, anything to you other than an object of charity?"

The greater reason was that Partridge himself had that secret in his own breast—the secret that he shared with Judge Bancroft alone, the secret that, not for his life's sake, would he have imparted to Tyrone or the daughter of Tyrone, these two whom he so greatly loved.

So Partridge held his peace. But he felt that there was a blow impending. He could only hope—and pray.

Partly at least could Mélissine aid him, and she did. But Partridge quaked—quaked in spite of his faith, in spite of such consolation as he could derive from that calendar that Mélissine had given him, and also from the presence of Mélissine herself. Mélissine and Partridge

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were each, as a matter of fact, of great service to each other at this time.

For Nathan Tyrone was slipping, each day a little further from this world into the next.

CHAPTER XXI

RETURN OF THE LOVER

HE was like one of those men old Goodenough had mentioned—a part of him dead already. More correctly, he had found himself alone. For every man is more or less the captain of a troop during the better years—with his loves, expectations, his greeds and his follies and his fine aspirations, all keeping step with him. But these die, get shot to pieces, or desert. And then the captain knows that he is old, has nothing more to live for, that his own time has come.

Taps! Sound them for me when you will!

And now it was like that for Nathan Tyrone. The last of his phantom command had faded away. He also had been left alone.

That was what had happened to him that day in Notre Dame. It had happened to him even earlier. It had happened to him when he had seen Mélissine and Buckhannon talking together to each other in the Gardens of the Luxembourg. Only he hadn't known it. But he had known it when he saw them together in Notre Dame.

That day, the last of his spirit-companions "went West," beckoning him to follow.

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Before that he had still been poet and lover, father and bridegroom, youth and old man. Suddenly, all these spirit-companions had winged away—to the music of the *Miserere* and the tolling of the bell—and he had been left deserted. His heart still beat. He could walk about in the world. His eyes could see. He could eat and drink. But he was a mere imitation of a live man.

All this was the way he put it to himself. He had that sort of mind. Without Mélissine there was no life. There was no necessity for life. Once there had been such a necessity. This was no longer so. He had been supplanted.

Mélissine attended him with a purity of devotion that was perfect and beautiful. Even so, Tyrone could see that she awaited but one thing—the day that would bring her Eugene back to her.

The snows of Cinnamon Street melted. The sparrows twittered in the eaves. There came a premonitory wind out of the south. Winter came back and slashed about in March. But the enemy was beaten. Again the south wind came up with all the reserves of the exhaustless tropics.

There was grass in the chapel-yard, and this went green. Here and there a crocus appeared in the grass. It was like the first note of a fairy orchestra. There was an old rose-vine against the side of No. 6. This also burst into floral music.

And then, one day, Buckhannon himself rushed into the street like the impatient lover that he was. He ran

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up the steps of No. 6. He rapped out his summons on the knocker of the white Colonial door.

The birds all sang. A butterfly drifted about to his honor like an attendant airplane. The flowers all cheered—that is, they sent up their perfume. Any one could have seen that this was a great event—that this was what the world had been waiting for.

However, there was a longish delay.

And, in the course of this longish delay, there arrived over the spring-time heart of Buckhannon a touch of cold—somewhat as if a breath of winter had come back to wither the blossoms a bit, burn the young verdure of the trees.

He cast a look back of him. There was the druggist across the street. The druggist had hinted at queer tales. Down there by the chapel fence he saw the policeman, Hitchcock, and Goodenough. He caught a whiff of ghoulish verse and dark whispers. This was the house with a bad name! This was the house with a bad name!

But he bethought himself of Notre Dame. He was shot through with a poignant yearning that brought its own relief. Notre Dame or New York, they were one. They spoke with the same voice. To this voice he listened: complex, a little lugubrious, richly chorded—the voice of the ten millions and the instruments of these. For bass notes of the organ he heard the muffled thunder of the ceaseless traffic, he heard the hootings and the moanings of the harbor-craft, the sirens of outgoing liners and incoming battleships; but most

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of all he heard the plaintive trebles of those who sweated and strove, whimpered and prayed.

Then he was back in Cinnamon Street again—his spirit was. Once more he stood there in the presence of old No. 6. This, the voice of New York and of Notre Dame, became the voice of the house with the bad name. Hear it moan! Hear it appeal to the judgment of God! Hear it say:

"Grace! Grace! Since I have given you this one beautiful thing, this girl who will walk at your side!"

And what could the whole world say but that? What could any human life say but that?

The door opened.

Buckhannon would have sprung forward with a cry of joy, expecting Mélissine. Instead, it was Partridge who opened for him. Partridge was not the flute-player when he opened the Tyrone door to receive a guest for his masters. He was the perfect servant. Even so, he couldn't conceal something of chill, something of dread, something of mystery about him.

Had he said: "Pause, young man! There is mystery here!" his impression on Buckhannon's sensitive imagination would have been about the same. The bourdon of Notre Dame began to toll.

Said Buckhannon: "Is Miss—is Mr. Tyrone at home?"

This instead of the burst of song, figuratively speaking, that he had prepared. Were Notre Dame and Mélissine mere hallucinations?

There was a mystery about this house. There was no delusion about that. Goodenough was right—that

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time he had said that all old houses and all old men are haunted. He was literally right.

One would have said that Partridge himself was haunted right now—he the perfect servant, the butler *par excellence*, the immaculate gentleman who'd loved a lady, sir.

Quite by accident, Partridge had let his eyes travel across the street. It was a habit of his, that rather backward tilt of the head and a glance into the distance. And Partridge was old. His eyes saw rather better at a distance than they saw things close by. There was the drug-store across the street. The drug-store occupied the street-floor of a little two-story frame building. There were living quarters on the upper floor, and almost always at the door of the hallway at the side of the drug-store there hung a card announcing that upstairs there was a room to rent.

To-day the card wasn't there.

One of the upper windows was open.

At this window Partridge had seen a face—a calm and watchful face—a pale face with dark, dark eyes and red, red lips.

It all happened in an instant.

"Mr. Tyrone is ill, sir," Partridge heard his own gentle and well-modulated voice informing the visitor.

He heard the visitor say: "That is too bad. Will you announce me, please? I am Mr. Buckhannon—Mr. Eugene Buckhannon. I have just arrived from Paris. They were expecting me."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Partridge aloud. To himself he

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said: "The Lord is our shield." And again aloud: "They were indeed expecting you, sir."

He bowed the visitor in.

And also in Buckhannon's self there was a sort of riot—an election-riot; two rival factions in there, each clamoring for the election of its candidate. And one of the candidates was Courage. And the other candidate was Fear.

CHAPTER XXII

THE UNFINISHED STORY

THERE was a drawing-room at the left of the hall, and at the door of this Mélassine met him. She was dressed as the original model of the great La Tour might have been dressed away back in the eighteenth century. And she was looking at him as the model may have looked at the painter—so modest, so demure, so filled with a divine and mysterious fire.

Her hair was brilliant and bright. It was almost an illumination in this dusky interior—a pale shimmer of gold—"like a rose upside-down," as the poet said—a yellow rose. Her throat and her shoulders were bare except for the semi-transparent scarf she had drawn about them. So far as color went, she was a symphony of pale yellows and pale blues. Her pink lips were tightly shut—so tightly shut that one would have said she was having difficulty to control the emotion that made her young breast rise and fall like that and which gave a visible vibrancy to her whole presence.

But there was no controlling the look in her dark-blue eyes. Something was dawning there—a dawn of flame.

And just the sight of her, and the flash of a thought that the whole universe had been organized since the

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dawn of time to the end that a girl like this should be waiting for him, Eugene Buckhannon, here and now, made Buckhannon feel like a prince in a fairy-tale. A thrill went through him that was like the casting off of all weight, all worry. He was taller, stronger, more magnificent than any one else in the world. He stepped forward with a gasp of thanksgiving.

"Do not disturb father just yet," said Mélissine.

She had spoken to Partridge. She had risen to the height of the occasion. She was perfectly self-possessed.

As for Partridge, he had disappeared.

And there were the two of them together—Mélissine and Eugene in the ancient drawing-room. It was a beautiful room—with the selected beauty that had survived for a century or so; and all the Tyrones had been sensitive to beauty. It was an eighteenth-century room, paneled in old French walnut. There were panels either by or after Boucher on the wall. There was a Beauvais carpet on the floor. The furniture, of the period, was upholstered with Gobelin tapestry.

"Oh, Mélissine," breathed Buckhannon.

For a moment he had paused. He was artist as well as lover. Both personalities within him had fused and made him swoon almost—as if he had been in Tyrone's garden of poppies.

"Oh, Eugene," she answered him, playfully.

"I thought I had been with you always—since you went away," said Buckhannon. "I have, in spirit. But this transcends the spirit."

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She said nothing now. But she thrust out her hands. Her knees may have failed her, somewhat.

"You are so wonderful," he informed her, after a long interval. "You would be wonderful anyway. But you are so wonderful in that dress."

"It was my mother's," she told him, stroking his head.

She was enthroned in one of the Gobelin chairs. He was seated on the Beauvais carpet at her feet.

"What a pity it was," he said, "that she ever died."

"I shall never believe in the thing that people call death," she informed him gently. "That would be too terrible. It would mean that soon father also would be dead."

He looked up at her, searching for her meaning. "I was sorry to hear that he was ill," he murmured.

Her blue eyes went liquid, but she smiled. "By and by," she said, "it will be just as it was with you and me when we said good-by to each other over there in Notre Dame. He will be in one place and I in another. But I don't want to think of that as death. I don't see why people should call that death, and why they should dress themselves in black. See! We are together again. I didn't put on black when you and I were separated for a while."

"You are altogether beautiful," said Buckhannon.

"I wear these," Mélassine informed him—and she indicated the clothes she wore—"because he has always wanted to see me like this."

"Can you blame him?"

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"But now he has given me permission to dress myself as other girls do."

And thus the conversation drifted from death to dress as lightly as a butterfly might have drifted from poppy to rose, from rose to poppy.

But underneath all that they said and thought was the solid earth of rocks and hidden rivers. They loved each other. Life was dark and sometimes mysterious, but on the whole life was very beautiful. And also—Mélissine had said—life was everlasting. Everlasting though it be, back there in the music-room sat Nathan Tyrone at the threshold of the brighter chamber men have always called death.

It was Mélissine herself who announced Buckhannon's advent to her father.

"He wishes to speak to you alone," said Mélissine to Buckhannon.

Hastily, tenderly, she allowed Buckhannon to touch her lips with his own. And thus anointed and purified, so to speak, Buckhannon came into the presence of Mélissine's father.

"I had been wanting to talk to you," said Tyrone.

He sat nerveless in his chair in front of the fireplace. The air was mild but there was a fire on the hearth. There was a rug over the sick man's knees. It smote Buckhannon to the heart to think that in a presence like this Mélissine had greeted him as bravely as she had, and had spoken her brave words.

"Yes, sir," this with a fervor.

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"Mélissine has told me," said Tyrone, "that you and she are devoted."

"There is nothing I wouldn't do——"

"She tells me that you have plighted your troth."

"God grant——"

The conversation was too momentous for Buckhannon. He could only falter his broken sentences.

"There was something"—Tyrone also was speaking with an effort; his breath and possibly his mind were wavering—"there was something that I felt I must tell you—and win your assent before I could approve."

"If it concerns me—or my family," Buckhannon began.

"It concerns Mélissine," said Tyrone.

Buckhannon remained silent, eager, assenting already in his heart. There was nothing in his heart but the vision of Mélissine as he had seen her just now, and the love and the reverence that this vision inspired.

But it wasn't to be always so.

They say that the higher a man goes on the path the more killing are the tests he has to endure. It was somewhat like that now.

Tyrone murmured something about the necessity of telling Buckhannon more about Mélissine, else he couldn't die in peace. Buckhannon waited. The silence had become a crisping silence now. And there was Tyrone, gasping for breath, unable for the present to say anything more.

Partridge omniscient to his master's needs, came in.

"I'll come back to-morrow," Buckhannon whispered.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NIGHTMARE

THERE was a Swedish lyric that Buckhannon had run across somewhere. It was one that well might have had a place in old Goodenough's anthology of weird verse. It went like this:

I in a vision
Saw my lost sweetheart,
Fearlessly toward me
I saw her stray.
So pale! I thought then;
She smiled her answer:
"My heart, my spirit,
I've kissed away." *

Mélistine's vision hovered wan about Eugene Buckhannon all that night as he tossed sleepless in his bed. Not all night, for late into the night he had walked, and walked, and walked—from Washington Square to Union Square, from Union Square to Madison Square, from Madison Square to Central Park, from Central Park to Riverside Drive. Even so, the vision had kept him company. There were no people in the squares or

* "Anders Oesterling's "Meeting of Phantoms" (in C. W. Stork's Anthology of Swedish Lyrics from 1750 to 1915).

The Nightmare

streets. These were phantoms whom he saw. The realities were these others.

Mélistine!

Nathan Tyrone!

Old Partridge of the Waxen Face!

Now that he thought of it, what a weird, weird person was Mélistine!—half child, half woman!—a thing of exquisite life, dressed with the habiliments of the dead!

And what was the thing that her father had started to say to him? Was it merely that his daughter was an angel and that he, Buckhannon, should treat her as such? This would have been the natural thing. That's what he would have said if he, Buckhannon, had been her father!

But if this were the case, why should the butler, Partridge, have acted so strangely at the door? Why had he started like that, and stared, as would have started and stared one who suddenly realized some dreadful truth, or saw something dreadful that was invisible to other men? Was Partridge a poisoner? He didn't look like one. But wasn't it possible that Partridge had poisoned his master?—with his master's consent?—for some good purpose?—because of some benefit that this would bring to Mélistine?

Mélistine was one to inspire men to heroic sacrifices like that. Himself, Buckhannon, wouldn't he commit murder or suicide, on her account?

And through all these meditations, reveries, mad flights of fancy, the vision of Mélistine hovering there—like the

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pale sweetheart of the lyric he remembered. Lost? Would she ever be lost to him? His heart shuddered at the thought. And yet, such things had been.

He himself was like a lost soul in a haunted forest. Through this figurative forest he groped his way to a solid oak-tree he could trust, and about this he flung his arms; and he clung to it, until he fell into at least something that resembled sleep.

The oak-tree was Faith.

He loved Mélissine. She loved him. God Himself had given her to him. In Notre Dame, God had given her him.

But Buckhannon knocked softly nevertheless when he came to the door of the old house in Cinnamon Street on the following afternoon. He had forced himself to wait until afternoon because he had so ardently wished to come at daybreak. He believed in discipline.

Softly the door was opened, and there stood Partridge. It struck Buckhannon that there was a greater air of mystery about Partridge than ever. Why?

Buckhannon hesitated. He swallowed. There was a little catch in his voice that he didn't like as he asked: "May I see him?"

"This way, sir," said Partridge faintly.

And Partridge led Buckhannon into the music-room, whither Buckhannon had gone the day before.

But the room was changed. The fireplace was dark and hidden by a screen. From above it the portrait that so resembled a portrait of Mélissine looked down

The Nightmare

through a sparkling haze of candlelight. It was curious that so many candles should have been lit in mid-afternoon.

The light of them constituted a bedazzlement.

Buckhannon heard a ghostly whisper: "*He did not know! He did not know!*" It was the voice of the old butler.

"Know what?" Buckhannon asked.

There was no reply.

Then Buckhannon saw that the candles stood at the head and the foot of a sort of lofty couch and that on this couch lay the man he had come to see.

"He is dead!" gasped Buckhannon.

All Partridge could do was to bow his head. Partridge was strangled. Partridge was inarticulate.

Not so Mélassine.

When Mélassine came in, it was almost as if Buckhannon was seeing again his phantoms of the night. For she was pale. But she was dressed with as much lightness and beauty as she had shown the day before. Had she read the look in Buckhannon's eyes? If she had, she had answered it:

"This is the way he would have had me be," she whispered.

Buckhannon took her hand and pressed it to his lips. He was as strangled and inarticulate now as Partridge was. Then, after a while Mélassine spoke again. Her voice had taken a childish quality because of its tendency to break. But she was as brave as a little Jeanne d'Arc.

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It was as if she were fighting the fight alone and for all of them:

"He's merely gone away," she said. "He's merely gone where some day all of us will join him. It will be beautiful there. He will love it. He will love it better than France." Each sentence had its little gasp, its rising accent. "And why should we have faith," she queried gently, "if we can't have it at a time like this?"

Buckhannon looked into her eyes. She closed her eyes and two tears trickled out. He caught her in his arms and held her there.

The neighbors must have been watching, watching. This night they had seen No. 6 become a center of sinister excitement. They had seen a sable wagon come and go. They had seen men dressed in black enter the house and go away again. Was somebody sick? Was somebody dead? One would have thought so—and yet there was no badge of mourning on the door.

They saw no sign of mourning about the house whatsoever until some time after they had seen the young man (Buckhannon) go into the house. But then they were rewarded.

It was just as if here, in front of their eyes, was happening the thing they had waited for all these years.

A woman had crossed the street from the direction of the druggist's shop. She was the Woman in Black. She was veiled in black. But they guessed that she was beautiful—from her graceful lines and her slightly sinuous walk as she mounted the stoop of No. 6 and lifted the knocker.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE OTHER MOURNER

BUCKHANNON had a highly intelligent eye. It was not only the well-trained physical eye of his profession. It was the sympathetic eye of the interpreter back of this physical eye—the eye of the dreamer and the imaginer. It was this eye, fine and complex, with which he had observed Partridge that first time Partridge had opened the door for him. It was the eye with which he now observed not Partridge only, but the Woman in Black, and Mélissine.

Buckhannon and Mélissine had come into the hall on their way to the drawing-room. They lingered when they heard the rap on the door. Partridge had wafted past them on his way to open.

When the Woman in Black came in it was as if, for the first time, death had entered.

This figure was like an incarnation of death. She was a personification of mourning, at any rate—a character out of one of those old powerful pictures by Doré. It rather heightened the effect that her bearing and her lines were those of youth, not age. All the more it made her the Dark Angel. It was just as if Partridge had opened the door and then the Dark Angel had come in.

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And there was something about the appearance of Partridge to indicate that this was the way he felt about it, too. There was a touch of terror about Partridge, certainly of distress.

Or was this merely something that he had brought with him from the room back there, where his master lay?

Buckhannon was not to be left long in doubt.

The strange visitor had entered with an indefinable gust of haste and satisfaction. It was just as if she had said: "At last! At last!"—had said this with an inaudible voice that none the less was capable of shaking the souls of all of them. But once inside the door and the door closed behind her, she paused.

Buckhannon heard her whisper: "You know who I am."

It wasn't a whisper precisely, but her voice had been very soft. She had spoken to Partridge. Her words had carried with them a suggestion of authority.

Partridge wavered. She waited.

Partridge said: "Yes, madam."

In the meantime the woman had looked in Buckhannon's direction—had looked at him and Mélissine. Buckhannon felt a slight tremor at his side; he felt Mélissine's light hand creep into the hollow of his arm as if she were seeking for protection.

"I'd protect you, heart and soul, against all the fiends of hell," Buckhannon silently assured the owner of the hand.

There was an uncanniness about it—that veiled

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scrutiny of the unknown. The veil was black. The visitor's face was invisible through it, but her eyes glowed, only dimly discernible.

"Introduce me," the visitor had next demanded.

"You have come to see Mr. Tyrone," quavered Partridge. "You know of the misfortune."

It was manifest to Buckhannon that Partridge was seeking time—manifest that Partridge was up against a situation that was all dark confusion for him. Buckhannon felt sorry for the old man. And his heart fairly yearned over Mélissine. All the same, this was a continuation of his nightmare. Not that there was anything horrible about it. There had been nothing horrible about the nightmare itself. It had been just a vague drift of doubts and melancholies. That was all. Had there been bristles on his spine, as there doubtless had been on the spine of some remote ancestor, these bristles would have been drawn erect.

"Introduce me," the woman ordered softly, but with a note of finality.

And thereupon she threw back her veil.—

It was Buckhannon's turn to start. The sight of the woman's face recalled that other face he had seen—the woman who had kissed him at the side of the chapel fence. Buckhannon felt an ache at his solar-plexus—there where some say is the real center of the intellect—and this pain of his was intellectual as much as it was physical. There could be no mistake. This was she. Her face had become the face of a hag in his dreams, and yet it was beautiful.

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Her face was very pale. It wasn't a dead white. She had a fine complexion, but all of the one tone—ivory white. This accentuated the rest of her coloring—her dark red hair, her bright red lips, and her brilliant large eyes which were almost black. It wouldn't have taken a trained observer to decide that her eyes were penciled and that her lips had likewise been sagaciously enhanced.

But only a trained observer would have noted perhaps that mixture of boldness and caution she radiated about her. It was something to remind one of a powerful wild animal, furtive and alert, which finds itself in the midst of strange surroundings, yet still in a situation where it has long wanted to be.

But also Mélissine had recognized her. This was the strange woman who had spoken to her in the store. Perhaps neither had Mélissine been wholly without her haunt since then.

Buckhannon and Mélissine had not been standing still. They had advanced somewhat. All that had transpired thus far had developed deftly, without apparent let or lapse of time.

"Madame——"

Partridge had quavered this.

The visitor turned from him with a certain contempt. She had again cast her eyes on Buckhannon and Mélissine. They came back to Buckhannon. For what seemed to him like a long, long time, the woman was looking at him and he was looking at her. In her turn she had given a little gasp.

"An unfortunate—come to atone," said Buckhannon

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to himself; and he felt a quiver of pity. This may have revealed itself in his look.

Anyway, the woman rewarded him with a smile. The smile was like the flash of recognition a wild animal would have shown—veiled and enigmatic.

Whereupon Buckhannon's pity became a vague little whiff of terror. It was a terror compounded of all the things he had heard, or which had reached him by way of suggestion—from the druggist, from Hickcock, the policeman, and Goodenough, the coachman.

Buckhannon had given a hasty glance at MéliSSine. There was an impulse in his mind to tell MéliSSine not to worry, not to be frightened. But MéliSSine herself was looking at the strange woman with a blossoming sympathy.

It was evident that MéliSSine, moreover, was conscious of her duties as hostess.

"Do you wish to see father?" MéliSSine inquired gently, stepping forward.

The visitor smiled at MéliSSine.

She had paused just long enough to give a look at Partridge. To any one who would have cared to interpret, it was a look that said: "And that's enough for you, servant!"

She approached MéliSSine with her swift and sinuous movement, shaking out as she did so a perfume of the Lord knows what from her sable garments—something musky and Oriental. She put her arm around MéliSSine—Buckhannon drawing back respectfully, not to say

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distrustfully, to give her room—and she planted her red lips to Mélissine's white temple.

"I am Mme. Jenesco," she announced in her warm, soft voice. "But you may call me Belle. I am sure that we are going to love each other."

CHAPTER XXV

OF FLOWERS AND SPECTERS

PARTRIDGE had remained near the door where the woman had left him. Partridge was making a pretense that the fastening of the door was out of order. But when Buckhannon came up and spoke to the old man, Partridge turned and reeled slightly until his back was against the door. He looked as if he needed the support. He looked as if he were being strangled by a set of invisible fingers.

Mme. Jenesco and Mélissine were for the moment out of hearing. They had gone into the music-room.

"Who is she?" Buckhannon demanded.

"She is Mme. Jenesco," Partridge gasped.

"I know that," said Buckhannon steadily. "I was just introduced to her." He looked at his hand, as if Mme. Jenesco's fingers might have left their trace there. His fingers were still conscious of the contact. He raised his hand nearer his face. The perfume also lingered.

"She was married, I believe, to a M. Jenesco," said Partridge. "A Rumanian, sir, if I remember correctly."

Buckhannon put out his hands and let them rest lightly on the old man's shoulders. Buckhannon had the feeling in his arms that he could have grappled with a giant

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—that he would have grappled with anything that he could see or get hold of. But his hands were gentle. Partridge was fragile, he was in misery; and Buckhannon knew by this time how Mélissine loved him.

"I want you to understand now and always," Buckhannon said, "that I am your friend."

"Thank you, sir."

"There seems to be some sort of a mystery here."

It was a phrase that had become familiar in his thought, but which never before had he spoken aloud. The look that Partridge returned to him was a confirmation.

"If there is anything that concerns your welfare or the welfare of Miss Tyrone," Buckhannon hurried on, "I want you to tell me what it is. I want you to let me help you."

"I dare not!"

"Dare not?"

"I dare not! Do not ask me, sir."

"Why should you try to hide it? I'm your friend. Can't you trust me? God knows I'm asking a greater trust from Mélissine!"

"God bless you, sir!"

"Tell me," Buckhannon pleaded.

"I—I never thought, sir—that it would come to this," said Partridge.

And any one could have told that Partridge was not confronting the immediate incident so much as he was regarding the whole vast landscape of the past.

"Well, what has this woman to do with it?"

Of Flowers and Specters

"I must ask you to be patient. So would Mr. Tyrone have wished."

"She's a bad woman."

"She looks it—I have suspected——"

"Have her thrown out of the house," said Buckhannon, whose only thought was to save Mélissine from contamination. An electric needle was plucking at his mind. It buzzed and burnt with George Sterling's line:

Smiles bloodily against the leprous moon!

. . . sated at her feast,

Smiles bloodily against the leprous moon . . .

"No! No!" cried Partridge.

"Why not?"

"I—we can arrange——"

"By God," said Buckhannon, and he was declaring this to himself as much as he was to Partridge, "before I allow anything or any one to touch Mélissine's happiness——" He stopped.

When men say something to some one else, they often listen to themselves. Buckhannon was now haunted by the thought that what he said had sounded false even to his own ears. He knew that, while he started to make his declaration, and was listening to it, he was also hearing the voice of Tyrone—Tyrone trying to tell him something; and now Tyrone was dead; and he, Buckhannon, was in a panic of doubt.

In his own extremity, Partridge was casting about hither and yon, seeking for something that he could cling to. Curiously enough it was something he had

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read a long time ago. He controlled himself. He was getting back his strength. His mild eyes met Buckhannon's squarely.

"Let us not strive," he said. "Let us be gentle."

"But this—" Buckhannon began. "Tell me: Is it anything that impinges on the honor of Mélissine?"

"She need never know."

"She need never know what?"

"If you lack faith—if you are afraid," said Partridge, "it were better that you go."

"I'll not go," said Buckhannon. "I'll never go but that she goes with me."

"God bless you, sir. Pardon me, but—we'll need you. The Lord has sent you in this the hour of our need."

Partridge had permitted himself no sleep since twenty-four hours at least. Old men require less sleep than young ones do. Still, he was much wrought up. He wasn't very robust.

"What do you want me to do?" queried Buckhannon, after an interval.

"Should you care to, sir, I would suggest that you take Miss Tyrone into the garden for a breath of air. She needs it. She wouldn't go alone. She would go with you."

"And *her*!"

It was a reference to the Woman in Black.

Partridge drew himself up. "Leave her to me, sir. I shall try to do whatever is best."

There was the gate between the Tyrone property and the yard of the abandoned chapel. Through this gate

Of Flowers and Specters

Mélistine and Buckhannon made their way. The early spring twilight was in the air, also a smell of grass and trees and flowers. The hour and the place were such as Buckhannon had yearned for many and many a time while he was still in Paris and Mélistine was in New York. Thus had he walked with her in his thought, and he had been certain that not heaven itself could have been otherwise.

Yet here he was, miserable, miserable and haunted!

He turned to Mélistine. He concealed all that he could of the doubt that was assailing him.

"Who was that woman?" he asked.

"I never saw her before in my life, except once," Mélistine replied. She told of the meeting in the store. "She is a curious creature. It is very strange."

"What is very strange?"

"She said that she was glad that at last we had been brought together. She spoke as if she were intending to come here to live. I think that it was about this she wanted to speak to Partridge."

Partridge was in there speaking to her now.

"Don't worry," said Buckhannon. "It will turn out all right."

"But oh," cried Mélistine; "I do wish I knew what it was all about!"

Buckhannon held his peace. It would have to be as Partridge said. He would have to be patient. But he was sad.

Mélistine, feeling the sadness that was upon him, paused—and made him pause, with a gentle pressure on

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his arm—and she held up a rose that he might smell it. But as Buckhannon inhaled the fragrance of the flower and closed his eyes with a hope of shutting out everything else, all that he could think of was Nathan Tyrone, and Partridge, and the Woman in Black, and their ghostly confrontation.

The shadows deepened. The candlelight glimmered through the windows of the music-room. There for a time Mélissine and Buckhannon could hear a murmur of voices—as if the three who were in there arranged some new edict of fate.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DARK CLAIMANT

IT was a ghostly confrontation, indeed, that which was taking place now in old No. 6 Cinnamon Street. For a time Mme. Jenesco and Partridge had lingered there in the silent music-room with Nathan Tyrone—and all the other Tyrones looking down from the walls.

"I hope," said Partridge, "that you said nothing to Miss Tyrone."

For a while longer the visitor continued to look at the pictures on the wall. She looked at them with a certain satisfaction. From her bearing it might have been doubtful whether she had heard Partridge at all.

"Not, of course," Partridge pursued, "that there was anything you could have said—anything to disturb her peace of mind, I mean."

He was stumbling. The woman turned and surveyed him with a degree of amused contempt. She took her time about her survey. But if she intended to squelch Partridge, reduce him to a further confusion, she missed her guess. Partridge was gradually getting still more of his strength back, reassuming the poise that had become native to him during his years of service.

"Your coming here," he reminded her, "was very irregular."

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She raised a shoulder slightly. She said: "Indeed!"

"I have always counseled you not to come here," Partridge continued softly. Partridge was stooped, but this was the stoop of age rather than of any humility supposed to attach to his station. His face and his voice were dignified.

"I am not sure," the woman retorted slowly, "that you haven't taken a good deal upon yourself."

"I was constrained to," Partridge informed her. "Mr. Tyrone honored me with his confidence in so many ways. I dare say I did not misjudge his own wishes in the matter."

The woman reflected. She had the air of one who listens to the mind rather than the heart. But she took a handkerchief, in a leisurely way, from the black bag she carried. The handkerchief had a black border. With this handkerchief she touched her eyes.

"There is no occasion for showing yourself so heartless," she announced.

Partridge also meditated, a trifle wonderstruck.

"If I have seemed heartless," he said, "I beg of you to accept my apology. I assure you that I am not heartless. Anything that I have said was merely dictated by my devotion to Mr. Tyrone and to Miss Tyrone. He had never informed her of his difference with his father. At least, I am quite certain that he never told her of the causes of that difference. Miss Tyrone has an inquiring mind. Your coming here now, and your assumption—again I shall have to ask your pardon if what

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I say should wound you—your assumption of friendship—not to say familiarity——”

“That’s enough!” the woman broke in upon him. “You’ve said quite enough!”

There was no appearance of grief about her, real or assumed. There was something beginning to simmer inside of her—something that may have been latent when she came here. She jammed her mourning handkerchief into her bag.

“True,” said Partridge. “We shall consider the interview at an end.”

Mme. Jenesco didn’t move, except for the sort of tense vibrancy about her. She looked at Partridge.

“Perhaps,” she said softly, “I have decided to remain—this time for good.”

“I am getting a little old,” said Partridge. “My hearing is not what it should be. I must have misunderstood.”

“You heard what I said.”

“And I beg to remind you that you heard what I said. I desire that we bring this interview to a close before Miss Tyrone returns. I shall further suggest, finally, that you do not return here again.”

The sultriness about the woman increased, but outwardly she maintained a perfect control of herself—she did except for the purring note that came into her voice. There was a purr about the entirety of her. She suggested a panther—a black panther—in the presence of some new but fascinating prey.

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"Do you still think that you are expressing Mr. Tyrone's wishes when you talk to me like that?"

"Not only his, madam," said Partridge quietly, "but also Mr. Buckhannon's—Miss Tyrone's affianced husband." Partridge was happier when he could ascribe authority to some one else.

It took Belle several seconds to catch this allusion.

"Oh," she said; "you mean *him!*" She laughed. "I should worry about *him!* Why, you'll find that he's one of the best friends I've got." She meditated the *coup*, like a cat playing with a mouse. "We think so much of each other that he kissed me—the very first time we met."

Partridge believed that she was lying, but tears came into his eyes. This was a blow aimed not at him but at Mélissine. It gave him some hint of what might follow.

"But he's a nice boy," said Belle. "He's no worse than any other man—than Mr. Tyrone was in his relations with my mother."

There followed another silence while Partridge stood there—now at a loss and with his mouth open trying to imagine what she meant, trying to stifle his own misgivings, and while Mme. Jenesco looked at him from her side of the room with her red-lipped smile.

"Since you refer," said Partridge, softly, "to your unfortunate mother——"

"Unfortunate's the word!"

"It is the word. God pity you that you should have forced me to refer to her as such. Is it possible that you have forgotten all that he did—for her—and you?"

The Dark Claimant

Belle still smiled at him. Her lips were parted now, and her breast was rising and falling as if she were a little short of breath.

"I remember," she said. "I was fifteen years old when my mother died. Brought up the way I was a girl knows a lot—and can guess a lot—by the time that she's fifteen. I wasn't brought up like that little blonde, out there. I suppose you know that, too, don't you?"

"I request you to leave the house."

"You can save your stage stuff," she mocked him. "You'll need all of it a little later." Her voice took on an ugly drawl. "Say! What do you think I am, anyway? Do you think that just because he"—she tossed her head to indicate Nathan Tyrone lying there—"put something over on my mother that you can keep on putting the same stuff over on *me*? Why, you're nothing but a servant! You're nothing but a poor old man! I was feeling sorry for you. I came here to-day with the best intentions in the world. What do you mean by insulting my mother's memory just because she was unfortunate?"

"God forbid!" cried Partridge. "And this in *his* presence!"

"And where else?" Mme. Jenesco demanded, with a slow lash of passion. "Why not?"

"I don't know what you mean!"

"You lie!"

Partridge raised a groping hand. He forgot what he had raised it for. He let it fall again.

"You lie," the woman repeated, "and you know you

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lie. You've known it all along. You knew it as well as *he* knew it himself—and you stand there ready to deny it. Don't you dare to deny it."

Partridge's voice came in a gasp:

"Deny what?"

"That Nathan Tyrone was my father!"

CHAPTER XXVII

A BID FOR CHARITY

PERHAPS it was Mélissine's calendar that Partridge saw through his closed eyes. Perhaps it was that very quotation that he had recalled a little earlier in the hall when he was talking to Buckhannon. That sort of an expression came into his face:

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient."

He would cease to strive. He was going to be gentle and patient. He was going to try to teach. The woman watched his change of expression. Something of her own passion diminished.

"You started me," she said, as if almost in apology. "I'm just as eager to be a lady as any one. God knows I'm tired enough of being the other thing."

It was a sincere note. It sufficed to cause Partridge to look at her again—with a shade of fresh courage.

"I trust that you will believe," he said, still shakily, "that I have acted and spoken, hastily perhaps, but without malice. Your mother was brought to this house by Mr. Tyrone when she was sick and friendless. He was chivalrous. He was her friend."

The woman cut in on him. But one would have said

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that the bitterness in her tone was drawn from the bitterness of her own experience.

"Bah!" she exclaimed. "Men always say that!"

But Partridge persisted—patient, eager to teach.

"You could not have known Mr. Tyrone," he said gently, "thus to classify him with other men—not in respect to his relations with women. He was a man of the purest life."

"How do you know?"

"I knew him from the time he was born. I knew him—you might say almost—long before he was born. I knew his grandfather. He and I were together with General Grant. I was with his father many years. They were like that. Oh, they were too proud to have sullied themselves!"

Again the woman interrupted him. She fortified herself with a declaration.

"I'm not saying anything against him. I'm not saying that he wasn't better than most men. But he was a man. I love him. I honor him——"

"I knew,"—sobbed Partridge—"knew that you would see the light."

"—honor him," the woman pursued, disregarding the interruption, "as a daughter should."

Partridge collapsed.

"If it's a matter of money——" he faltered.

The woman stuck to her line of argument. "He was a man like any other man, though, when it came to that," she persisted. "You'll admit yourself that my mother was young and that she was beautiful."

A Bid for Charity

"I do admit it," said Partridge, with a gust of fervor. "It was her beauty that moved him to commit this act of folly. He always loved beauty so! He could never love anything ugly, either in word, or thought, or action."

"Then what are you trying for to make him out as the other kind?"

"I am not."

"You are. He brought her here to this house, didn't he? You say so yourself that he did. And he kept her here, didn't he? You admit that, too. And I suppose that you expect me to believe, and that you would have the world to believe, that he did it"—her voice became a taunt—"all for charity!"

"I do. It was charity. He was a poet. He was a gentleman."

She was bitter again.

"Oh, I know your gentlemen!"

"He was all that the word implies."

"That's right! They do that sort of thing—when a girl happens to be beautiful and happens to be poor. What do you know of what passed between them? You weren't sitting there watching them all the time. Compromised her! Kept her here until he was tired of her——"

She was saying other things, not all of which Partridge heard. It was a voice inside of himself that Partridge heard—the voice of that earlier doubt. Was the woman right? Had Nathan Tyrone's own father been right? It was a searing, darkening, damning doubt, and one that Partridge prayed against with all the fervor

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of his soul. Yet it was there. He recognized it for something that he had heard and seen before—a specter with a voice. Why not? What would there have been so strange if Nathan Tyrone had succumbed—first pity, then sympathy, then love, then a flame of passion—when he, Mr. Nathan, was still so young and inexperienced?

None the less, Partridge pleaded.

"It is not so! It is not so!"—and Partridge cast his two hands into the air. But he was not pleading to the woman. He was pleading to his own momentary loss of faith. Again he told the old tale of his master's goodness, gentleness, pride of soul, love of beauty. He even referred to that one and only and most beautiful passion in his life—for Mme. Tyrone and Mélissine.

Mme. Jenesco let him talk. Now he was on familiar ground. She let him get rid of some of his emotion in this safe way.

"And me! What was he doing for me all this time?"

"He was generous——"

"With money!"

"No man would have done more."

"What good did money do me? It wasn't money that I needed. It was love! It was real love! It was a father's love! Instead of that it was money—money—nothing but money! It's always been that when I wanted something else. They stuck me in a school that I didn't want to go to. They gave me an education that I didn't want. And when I ran away from it, looking for something that my heart craved—you know what happened to me—and what always happens to girls like that—and

A Bid for Charity

they offered me money—more money! Damn you, standing there and talking about money!”

She had advanced on Partridge almost as if she could have struck him. But it wouldn't have been him that she would have struck so much as it would have been the symbol of what she had learned to hate. She had been speaking with a subdued intensity. But at the very climax of her denunciation she stopped, her voice broke into a little sob. This time there were real tears in her eyes.

There, for a moment, Partridge looked as if he were sorely tempted to take her into his arms and console her. He started to console her—a broken, inarticulate word.

But the woman broke out, tearful, but still furious: “I tell you I'm going to claim my own! I'm coming to this house to live. I'm here and I'm going to stay. I'm tired of living like a beggar—now that I'm getting to be too old to be anything else.”

Partridge had turned. He walked with a tottering step, uncertain of his destination. Mechanically he straightened a chair. For a while he was standing with his face to the wall. He raised his hand to his forehead. He raised it a little higher and straightened the portrait of Mr. Eliphalet Tyrone.

The woman took advantage of the lull to regain control of herself. She opened her hand-bag. She looked at herself in the small mirror it contained. She straightened her mourning toque. She touched up her dark red

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hair where it curled out from under her toque over her temples.

But she must have appreciated that her battle was far from won as she closed her bag and turned to look after Partridge again. She gave a slight start. Maybe she felt that she was in the presence of something she did not altogether comprehend.

Partridge had been standing at the side of Nathan Tyrone looking down into his master's face. He was as if unconscious—Partridge was—of any other presence in the room. While the woman was still looking at him, Partridge slipped down to one knee. He folded his hands. He bowed his head.

Mme. Jenesco didn't care to look too much. She strolled over to the open but shuttered window. She tilted the slats of one of the shutters. She looked out. The long spring twilight had begun. Through the dusk she could see Mélissine Tyrone and Eugene Buckhannon slowly walking through one of the paths of the old graveyard. They were arm in arm. Buckhannon's head was bowed.

Beyond them, in the street, leaning against the iron pickets of the graveyard fence, like the figure of one who would have entered there to rest—even as she sought rest in this forbidden house—she saw some one whom she recognized as old Goodenough, the familiar coachman of the street.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A WREATH OF IMMORTELLES

IT is curious how silent and peaceful all the surroundings can be when a life and death struggle is in progress. This struggle that was taking place between Partridge and Mme. Jenesco was a life and death struggle in a way. It may not have been his or her particular life for which each struggled. But, if anything, it was a fiercer struggle precisely because of that—as if each had been fighting for something dearer than life—each fighting to preserve the life of a child: Mme. Jenesco trying to keep the breath of life in this baby imp of a hope she had conceived; Partridge trying to conserve the spiritual thing he had created out of his own spirit and flesh during all the years of his service. Yet, outside this house, outside this room, there was no sign of all this.

You couldn't have expected old New York to give any token of interest.

It meant nothing to New York what happened to a person or even a group of persons in an obscure old house. New York had crawled with dramas little and big ever since the first occupation by the Dutch.

Nowadays more than a thousand of her little men and women died every week of the year, and that was

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normal. Every day of the week a hundred or two of atoms who had called themselves New Yorkers, and who most likely had come to the big city from distant farms and villages, far coasts and mountain valleys—consumed with ambition, inspired with a divine belief in themselves and in their own divinity—choked out their lives in this or that dusty kennel—while the tears and prayers of relatives made each passing a drama of its own.

But old New York didn't mind. Hurdy-gurdies for New York, and the latest song, and the latest thing in reforms!

On this particular day there was no such street as Cinnamon, so far as any one would have noticed.

Through the broad, new avenue, paved with granite and lined with new factories and warehouses, raw and square, the big trucks thundered, and the iron-shod horses struck fire. Along the big docks the ships blew off steam and swallowed and disgorged their thousands of tons of freight. Out in the broad North River and around in the harbor generally, the little tugs scurried about like ants, and the big Sound and river boats churned their way for Albany or Boston; or a battle-ship came in like a floating mountain, or a floating skyscraper of a liner headed out for Europe.

Little difference it made to New York, or the world at large, these births, deaths, and other poignant accidents that never ceased under the ragged sky-line.

More curious yet, though, the quiet and the peace of the immediate vicinity.

Cinnamon Street itself was like that. Cinnamon Street

A Wreath of Immortelles

may have been watching everything from under half-closed lids like a drowsy dog—drowsy all the way from Tony Zamboni's, on the corner of the avenue, right on down to Pliny's which made of Cinnamon Street a cul-de-sac.

The spring twilight thickened. A few nighthawk sparrows still twittered in the vines of the chapel. A few bats were out policing the insect noctambules.

And up and down the gravelly, grass-grown path at the back of the chapel-yard, Buckhannon and Mélissine had continued to walk like two of Goodenough's ghostly lovers:

— No one walks there now;
Except in the white of moonlight.

"That old man is still over there by the fence," said Mélissine.

"That is old Goodenough, the coachman," said Buckhannon.

"Dear old soul!" said Mélissine.

"He looks as if he had been to market," Buckhannon remarked, speaking idly as one will whose real thought is elsewhere and too deeply planted for a blossom of words.

But Mélissine had continued to look in Goodenough's direction, a glow of interest and sympathy in her face.

"I do believe," she said, "that he has been trying to attract our attention. Let us go over. We will pretend to be talking about something else so as not to embarrass him if he didn't want to speak to us."

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"All right," said Buckhannon. "I always did feel grateful to the old fellow—for taking you out driving the first time that I ever came into Cinnamon Street. If it hadn't been for him I might never have seen you."

They were in a solemn and gentle mood. Most of the time they had been silent. They had no suspicion as to what turn of events might have developed between Partridge and the Woman in Black. But each may have prayed in a way that nothing was amiss. This with no certitude that everything was not right. Anyway, it must have been that to each one of them an answer to his and her prayer had come. Each was at peace—a peace so perfect that it would have been hard for any one, seeing them, to imagine that there, in that old house, right at the side of them, such a struggle was taking place and such a drama was being played as we have seen.

They hadn't gone very far before they became aware that Mélissine's guess had been correct. Old Goodenough had been making signals to them, sure enough.

Old Goodenough, outside the rusty palings, leaned against them and peered through them as he had so often done. Now, as ever, moreover, there was a look of poetic and melancholic aspiration on the old cabby's vinous face. He carried something on or under, or both on and under, his arm.

His whisper reached them—but at first only as a murmur, something that they could not understand.

"Oh!" Mélissine exclaimed, and she had run toward Goodenough through the grass.

A Wreath of Immortelles

Mélistine was intuitive.

It was a wreath of immortelles that Goodenough had brought; it was something that would have looked very old-fashioned anywhere except in Goodenough's possession or outside of Cinnamon Street. But there was something exquisitely proper about it here—like a thing that only a poet could have thought of.

And what Goodenough had been trying to whisper to them was that he had brought this wreath for the late master of No. 6.

"It is beautiful," cried Mélistine softly. "Won't you come in?"

Goodenough shook his head, but there was a courtlier refusal in his seamed and discolored face.

"Come on in, Mr. Goodenough," Buckhannon supplemented.

Goodenough stole a furtive look about him.

"I would," he said, "if I could come in without any one seeing me. But this is a street of evil rumors. I've done enough evil in my day without giving rise to more talk."

Mélistine probably was at a loss to understand this cryptic utterance, but Buckhannon got the sense of it—or thought he did. Goodenough was thinking about the druggist. He was thinking about old Hickcock. Goodenough had an imagination. He could imagine some of the tales they would invent if they saw him going into the house of mystery.

"And I am not clean enough," Goodenough was proclaiming with gentle frankness. He couldn't keep his

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eyes away from Mélissine. But his eyes were reverential—as one might surmise the eyes of a poet to be when they first glimpse the magic beauty of an as yet unwritten verse. “I once was clean,” said Goodenough. “I once was considered attractive. A man doesn’t have to be beautiful for that. The mind is enough—if fate leads him to the woman who knows what a mind is.”

“Your wreath is beautiful,” said Mélissine again. “Won’t you bring it in to him? I am sure that he would love to have you.”

Goodenough pondered. His face was very expressive there in the twilight. It was not so much like an old, old cabby peering through a rusty iron fence, as it was a young, young poet peering through the cabby’s rusty face.

“It may be that I could come in by the back door,” said Goodenough.

“You’ll come in by the front door,” gusted Mélissine, “and we’ll go with you. Won’t we, Eugene?”

“That we will,” Buckhannon answered.

So they left the graveyard by way of the gate at the side of the chapel, and they rejoined Goodenough there, where he had awaited them, and they brought him to the stoop of No. 6, and up the stoop and through the door—which they entered without knocking—just in time to perceive that something of importance must have been transacting there.

CHAPTER XXIX

THUS SPAKE THE SPIRIT

WHEN Partridge resumed his feet and turned to confront the visitor after having knelt at his master's side, he was somewhat like Moses when that prophet came down from Sinai with the tables of testimony in his hand, and he "wist not that the skin of his face shone. Partridge was calm. He was strong. He also shone with an inner light.

"I have listened to you with the utmost sympathy," Partridge said. "You will forgive me if I may have allowed it to appear otherwise. We must all of us forgive in this world, as we hope for forgiveness. We all have so much to forgive—so much to be forgiven."

The woman was on her guard. She watched him narrowly. However, she murmured an assent.

"I believe that you came here in response to a perfectly natural and praiseworthy motive," Partridge pursued; "one that bears testimony to your goodness of heart."

"Of course I did," the woman said; but she was still wondering what he was leading up to. She drew back from him a little as he passed her. She followed him into the hall and over into the drawing-room.

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"Pray be seated," Partridge said, with his new calm strong upon him.

She sank into one of the Gobelin chairs. She quietly watched the butler as he lit a small wax taper, then went about lighting other candles here and there. But presently the woman wasn't watching Partridge any longer. She had fallen into a contemplation of the beauties of the room. She sensed the richness of it. The Boucher pictures might have been nameless for her, but she must have guessed the value of them—and the value of furniture like this, the value of the Beauvais carpet beneath her feet.

Who knows? It may have occurred to her that all this might become hers—might already be hers by natural right.

Partridge was taking his time, as if he were not unwilling to profit by the occasion for extra thought. He paused and listened as an Ormolu clock chirred heavily, then struck softly with a golden tone. Partridge turned and looked at the visitor as note followed note.

"He loved that chime," he said.

The woman's mood was out of harmony.

"When I think of the way my mother lived, and the way I've lived!" she exclaimed.

"I have often wondered," Partridge countered softly. "It is one of the mysteries of this world—why there should be rich and poor: why one is master and one is servant. Not that I have ever regretted my own situation in life. It isn't one's place in the world. Sooner or later we are all driven to measure ourselves and

Thus Spake the Spirit

those about us, by spiritual values. There is a spirit in us that sometimes maketh us different from what the world judges us to be."

"To get your rights in this world you've got to stand up for them," said the woman. "That's what I'm talking about. And that's what I came here for. When I'm dead I'll be dead. But now I'm alive, and I won't be cast off any longer."

"You shall not be cast off any longer," said Partridge, with perfect patience. "That was what I had started out to say when you turned the conversation into spiritual channels."

"What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say that we could resume the allowance—I am certain that Mr. Tyrone would agree to this if he could speak—just as if you had not received the check for a year's allowance."

"What are you trying to do?" demanded the woman. "Are you trying to put me right back where I was? A miserly hundred a month! A lot of good that would do me."

"We might increase it."

"It isn't that. It isn't that at all," the woman cried. She forgot something of her education, reverted to something of her savage and untutored drawl. "Won't you ever see? You got me wrong. I'm just as good as that other girl. Look at her. Out there walking around with her sweetheart. Not a care in the world. This is a good house, even if it has got a bad name. And I'm going to live here."

The House With a Bad Name

"Have you no pity for Mr. Tyrone's daughter?"

"Has she got any for me?"

"She has always had pity—for every one."

"I don't want any of it."

"You said a little while ago," Partridge reminded her, "that your mother was beautiful. She was beautiful. And she had some beautiful qualities. Have you overlooked the fact that I was here when she was here? Hasn't it occurred to you that possibly I was thinking of her as well as of yourself when I made the proposal to have the allowance resumed? I am proposing that it be doubled. But it can only be if you are as considerate as your mother was."

"She wasn't considerate," said Mme. Jenesco. "She was a mark!"

"Those who are genuinely good often are the victims—in the eyes of the world," said Partridge. "But I dare say that they are not always such in the final judgment. I shall ask you, therefore, to return quietly to your old address; it seemed quiet and respectable."

"It was all of that," the woman jeered. "It was an old ladies' home!"

"I shall call to see you there immediately after the funeral."

"So you don't even want me in the same street."

"The rumors that were started when your mother was here, unhappily, still persist and give rise to other rumors——"

Partridge moved over to the doorway and held the

Thus Spake the Spirit

curtains back. Unfortunately, the action seemed to revive all of the woman's resentment and fire.

"I'm going to stay here," she said in a voice that had gone hoarse and ugly. "Get me? I'm going to stay here—where I belong. And I'm going to be the mistress of this house. I'm going to run it—and you—and her!"

A tinge of fire came into Partridge's pale cheeks.

"It is getting late," he said.

"I'm going to discharge you," said the visitor with slow decision. "You can go up and begin to pack right now."

Now Partridge met her eyes.

"Have you," he asked, "no sense of reverence?"

"Get!"

"I deny your authority."

"Do you deny that I am Nathan Tyrone's daughter?"

"I do."

"Oh, you do! So it's a scandal you're looking for!"

"There shall be no scandal."

"No, I suppose not, when I tell the whole world how Nathan Tyrone brought my mother here to this house and kept her here until the old man interfered and put her out."

"That is no proof."

"No. I suppose not. And it wasn't proof, either, that Nathan Tyrone kept putting up for us all these years, and spending money on my education and all that——"

"He did it out of the kindness of his heart," said Partridge.

"Because he knew that he was my father."

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"Not he," gasped Partridge. "He led a life of absolute purity. He wasn't your father."

"Oh, he wasn't!"

"No!" Partridge was at bay.

"Then who was?"

Partridge drew the curtains about him. He was waxen white. His eyes burned bright. His breath came in little gasps.

"It was I!"

CHAPTER XXX

"WHERE DID YOU GET IT?"

THE hall-door had opened and shut say ten seconds ago. Buckhannon and Mélissine and old Goodenough were there in the hall now. They had entered and made no sound, filled with the reverent tenderness proper to the occasion. Goodenough had his wreath of immortelles on his arm. He had laboriously taken off his hat—which had always seemed a part of himself—and this had taken a little time; and then Buckhannon, kindly and anxious to serve, had taken Goodenough's hat and hung it up for him.

But now all of them had been at rest long enough to hear the last part of the altercation:

" . . . He wasn't your father!"

" . . . Who was?"

"It was I!"

They had been startled. They hadn't wanted to hear. They could neither retreat very well nor go ahead. And then, before they could join in a common movement, Partridge himself had drawn the curtains aside and there they were.

Old Goodenough was the center of the group in the hall. He was like a gnome, an elemental come up out of

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the earth. His bold and discolored features were cast into strong relief by the flickering light. His stiff gray hair was like a whorl of wind-blown wheat. Back of him, a mere white shadow, was Mélissine, mostly eyes. Buckhannon was the picture of a man taken by surprise—as he was. But it was he who saved the situation, as much as it could be saved.

"We didn't wish to disturb you," he said to Partridge. "Our friend, Mr. Goodenough——"

He let his explanation, such as it was, run out in a gesture. Mélissine, quick to understand the needs of the situation if not the full purport of it, had come to Buckhannon's support. Her method of doing this was to shrink to his side so close that he could take her hand without the action being too apparent to the others.

"He wanted to see father," said Mélissine.

But if they had expected Goodenough to respond with an equal promptness to this manifest cue they were deceived. Goodenough, apparently, had forgotten all about them—forgotten all about the wreath of immortelles—so that the wreath now appeared to be a decoration intended for himself, like the wreaths they hang on statues such days as the Fourth of July. Goodenough stood there and looked and looked, and it was at Belle Jenesco, as if she were the only one present. His lips moved as if he were saying things, but no sound came.

Then Mélissine, aware that the moment of escape was gone anyway and that Partridge, just then, was the one most in need of consolation, stepped over to Partridge

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with her face up. She drew Partridge toward her and kissed him on the temple.

"This way," said Buckhannon softly, and he had taken Goodenough by the arm. Mélissine had joined them. She also touched Goodenough lightly, as if she and Buckhannon were Goodenough's sponsors at his initiation into some holy order. And Goodenough looked the part. He was deep in thought. He walked like one in a dream, and it could have been surmised that his dream was back there where Mme. Jenesco stood, and where she and Partridge were once again alone.

Partridge had been unable to keep back a few tears. It was Mélissine's kiss that had started them, no mere weakness.

Now that the whole world—as he reckoned it—had heard that declaration of his, Partridge, at that, might have been pardoned some small display of weakness.

It was quite obvious—or would have been to the unimpassioned observer had there been such present—that that declaration Partridge had made was altogether as upsetting for him as it could possibly have been for the Jenesco woman.

Partridge was an old gentleman of delicate feeling, of a perfect modesty. To him the mother of this woman who stood there now had always symbolized the world, the flesh, and the devil. She was the scarlet woman of Revelations. She was that to him now as he stood there with his eyes all misty, and this was her emissary who confronted him here. He had claimed this emissary as his own daughter—flesh of his flesh, spirit of his spirit.

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There crept into Partridge's pallid cheek a tinge of red.

The woman stared at him. She at once perceived the absurdity of his claim, and yet the cunning force of it. She knew well enough that what Partridge was now he had always been. Fundamentally no man changes. What he is in youth that he remains—on through middle age, over the crest and into the world beyond.

She didn't have to be told that Partridge, for all his seeming simplicity, had shot her little scheme all to pieces. She knew as well as any one that if it came to court not one man in a thousand would refuse to believe Partridge, would consent to believe her. Didn't he have everything to lose by making a claim like that? Didn't she have everything to gain if her own claim went through?

And ranged against her, as she also knew, would be the accumulated, piled-up discredit the world has always had for women like herself—and like her mother!

She was desperate. She oozed red like a cuttlefish oozing ink.

But this merely served to heighten the effect when her reaction came. This reaction came as if her surrounding sultriness had let out a quiver of white lightning.

"You, my father!" she panted.

No response from Partridge. None was needed.

There had been no thunder as yet; just those premonitory glitterings of electric energy. The air was very still. But even so, every now and then a shiver ran through the standing flames of the candles in the room as if

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they had been shaken by a common breath of eery anticipation.

"So it was you, was it, who sent me and my mother all that money?"

"We will not go into that," said Partridge, trying to dominate the situation.

"Oh, won't we!" the woman sneered.

"Mr. Tyrone knew nothing about money, cared nothing about it," said Partridge. "It was I who had the handling of all funds. I was free to handle these funds as I saw fit."

"Well, tell me this," said the woman, with a complacency which indicated how strong she knew her position to be. "Did Mr. Tyrone—or did he not—know that you was handing us this money—handing this money to my mother and me. If he did know it, and let you do it, that means that he *was* my father. If he didn't know it, and you handed this money to us all on your own, that means—well, maybe *that* can be settled in the courts."

"Surely," Partridge began, "you do not think—you do not really believe——"

"Oh, *don't* I?"

"My God, madam——"

"It's just like I say," Belle elucidated. "If Nathan Tyrone gave us all that money, then I can prove that I have a natural right to his property; and if you gave it to us, without him knowing about it, why it means that you've been looting the estate. That's all. You can take your choice. And you can go to Sing Sing and rot,

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too, for all I'll care"—her voice went bitter and ironical—"even if you *are* my father!"

"Oh—oh, for God's sake," whispered Partridge, short of breath. He panted for a few moments in comparative silence. "I beg of you to defer this discussion. All will be made clear; but not now—not now. There is something that I can't tell you; something that must never come to the knowledge of Miss Tyrone. Surely you would not like to see her suffer. She is an innocent creature, a most lovable character——"

He cut himself off short as he heard Buckhannon, Mélissine, and Goodenough returning through the hall. He straightened up and enjoined silence with a gesture. Mme. Jenesco, however, didn't care who heard her, or what they heard. She started to speak.

"Silence!"

Partridge had dominated the situation at last. So far as securing silence, he had. For the moment, that is, he had.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

FOR a long time Mme. Jenesco had been living in a lodging-house, up a side street off Eighth Avenue, in a drab and squalid neighborhood. When she went there, she had intended it to be a mere makeshift and temporary. Up until that time she had always managed to put on a certain amount of style. Jenesco, altogether undesirable as a husband in most respects, had at least been lavish—now and then—with his money; or rather with other people's money. Then Jenesco had left her—their married life, at the best, had been sketchy; but this time he had gone to prison. It was there that he died. So much for him. The point is that the lodging-house up the mean street had ceased to be the makeshift, had been threatening to become Belle's permanent abode.

She hated it. She feared it. In her moments of clear and detached self-analysis she did.

"This is you—this is a part of yourself," she would say to herself. "These people you see out there in the street, ugly and unwashed, the misfits and the has-beens, they're your sort; otherwise you wouldn't live with them." And at her fate she'd rage: "Never! Never!

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I'll kill myself first. I'm not meant to live like this. I want something better, and I'll have it."

The children in the street liked her well enough, and she liked them. She was always buying things for them. It was a species of luxury she allowed herself; it satisfied her hankering for admiration, sympathy, beauty—for happiness, in short.

But more and more she felt the lodging-house getting its grip on her. She left it for occasional ventures elsewhere—a visit to Atlantic City, a sojourn with a friend in some flat or other far up-town, a winter at Palm Beach. But these had been mere reprieves, each reprieve a little less attractive than the last. The old haphazard life was beginning to pall.

And the children of the street would see her again, day after day, month after month, and stare at her with frank admiration. She was not like the elders they knew at home—bitter and violent, generally ugly, jealously watchful of their privileges.

There were a dozen of these minor friends now in the street as she left the lodging-house for what she desperately hoped would be the last time. The children had seen the trunk brought down to the taxi-cab and had lingered about to see what might follow.

"Good-by, Gertie; I'm off," said Belle. "Good-bye, Lizzie. Good-by, Jo."

They smiled and twisted and said nothing in reply; but there was obviously a sincere regret back of their speechlessness. A bit of color was going out of their

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lives, a source of candy and sodas, a certain warmth of vague but pleasing fellowship. This lady had been good to smell and good to touch, good to hear and good to look at, and even satisfying in some dim way to the very souls of them.

Lizzie shrilled out: "Aincha *never* comin' back any more?"

Belle sang out: "Sure, sweethearts, I'll come back and look you up. Be good!"

The taxi grunted and sputtered for the start. She waved her hand, and now all of the human sparrows were chirping good-by.

"God," she muttered to herself, "if they only knew what I'm trying to pull! Poor little tikes! I *will* come back and see 'em if I only get away with this. I swear to God I will. I hope it brings me luck."

She was launched on the great adventure. She was going to live—for a while she was—at No. 6 Cinnamon Street. Perhaps the house would be hers. A house like that! No more of that dingy parlor and alcove-bedroom—that smelled of onions no matter how many sticks of Chinese punk she burned—that was getting so threadbare she no longer dared turn the light on full when she entertained a friend—where she met so many freaks and back-numbers on the stairs.

But she was safe. She was playing a safe game.

Didn't she really believe that the late Nathan Tyrone *was* her father? And wasn't she merely trying to protect herself?—and her property?—and doing now what

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her mother on her deathbed had made her promise she would do?

But all the time that she thus consciously or unconsciously rehearsed some rôle she might be called upon to play it was Partridge who mostly occupied her thought. She had seen him falter, quail, had heard him beg for mercy, every time she had mentioned the possibility of bringing him and the affairs of the Tyrones to court. Why should this have been so unless Partridge was a crook? And yet Partridge did not strike her as a crook. She drew on all her extensive knowledge of crooks—the late Jenesco and his friends, and certain friends of her own. No, Partridge had nothing in common with any of them.

And yet, he must be a crook. If he wasn't a crook, why was he letting her come to live in No. 6—when it would have been so easy to call a cop—or lock the door? Why had he made that funny crack about his being her father?—when he wasn't! Was it merely to save Nathan Tyrone's reputation? Hardly! That didn't have to be saved—not that way. Was it to save Mélissine's feelings?

Belle's thought gave a lurch. It was as if something back of her thought had given it a prod. Funny that she hadn't thought of this before! Who was Mélissine's mother? Belle had a vague recollection that it had been some French woman. That was it—some French actress! And since her own (Belle's) descent had been called into question, how about that of the little blonde?—she who had been getting the best of it all along?—living in

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the big house?—getting all the money she wanted to spend?—under the guardianship of Mr. Partridge?

"My God!" Belle exclaimed.

And there rushed into her mind without further bidding the way Partridge had always sought to protect Méliissine above all others, the things that Partridge had said about the secret he could not reveal—"*something that must never come to the knowledge of Miss Tyrone!*" Those were his words. "*Surely you would not like to see her suffer!*"

"Nobody gave a damn, so long as it was me who suffered," said Belle, and not without truth.

The cab suddenly began to jolt and she was reminded that she was already traversing the ancient cobbles of Cinnamon Street. The cab came up in front of No. 6—her home!

There was a tumult inside of her. There was a voice in there clamoring that she had a right to be here, that she had a right to this place, that the world owed it to her and that now, at last, the world was going to pay its debt.

Outwardly, though, there was no sign of this excitement. She got down from the cab with a perfect poise—so far as the watchers could see. She glanced up at the house. The door was closed. She felt a momentary panic lest it should be locked against her, after all. But she paid the cabman and gave him a generous fee.

"And," she said, "I may have to ask you to give the servant a hand with the trunk."

CHAPTER XXXII

MME. DELILAH AND—

IT was not Partridge, however, who opened the door. It was Eugene Buckhannon. At first sight of him, Belle's heart sank. She remembered something that Partridge had said to indicate that henceforward this boy was by way of becoming the master of the house. But this sinking of the heart Belle also overcame, so far as appearances went. She smiled at him, as Buckhannon came trotting down the steps. He was sober, but he was most polite. Moreover, his very first words were assuring.

"I'll help you," he offered.

And he did. He and the cabman carried the trunk up the high stoop and through the front door, Belle following, and there Buckhannon gave the driver another fee—one that sent the fellow off trying to hide his smile. The door closed.

"You knew that I was coming?" asked Belle. Now she was altogether mistress of herself.

"Yes. Partridge—Mr. Partridge——"

Through the twilight of the hall Buckhannon and Mme. Jenesco interchanged a friendly smile of their own. Buckhannon believed that the woman actually was Par-

Mme. Delilah and—

tridge's daughter and was determined to honor her and show his friendliness for her for Partridge's sake. But there was a quality in Mme. Jenesco's smile that made Buckhannon wince a little, made him color a little with a shame that happily she could not see. Was she smiling because of that time that she had kissed him—and he had let her kiss him—out there by the chapel fence?

"Mr. Partridge said you were coming," he said. "He and Miss Tyrone had to go away—something to do with—Mr. Tyrone—" He skipped all details. "So I offered to stay and watch the house."

"Did—Mr. Partridge"—and Belle stressed the "Mr." by her pause—"make any reference to what room I was to occupy?" She was going to watch her language. Hereafter she was going to speak like a lady. She knew how.

"Oh, yes," said Buckhannon. "By Jove! I should have got the chauffeur to give us a lift up the stairs."

"I'm strong," said Belle. "Maybe you and me—I hate to bother you——"

"No bother at all. I'm thinking about you. I bet I could carry it up myself."

"You'll do no such thing."

"Watch"—and before Belle could interfere, Buckhannon had caught the trunk by a strap on the end and had lifted it to his knees.

"You'll hurt yourself," cried Belle.

"Wait till I rest it on the stairs," said Buckhannon. There he had intended getting it onto his back in the way that he had seen expressmen handle such cargo.

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But disaster almost overtook him. The trunk was heavy. It was beginning to slip.

"Oh, see," said Belle with real alarm. She was alarmed for Buckhannon, not for the trunk.

She tried to pass him so that she could get a hold on the trunk at the forward end; but she was so rushed that she struck a corner of the trunk. It swung round. Without such a jolt Buckhannon had been having all he could do to keep his balance. He toppled. The front end of the trunk came to the carpet. The end he held leaned against him. And he would have fallen—with the trunk on top of him, most likely—if Belle hadn't been where she was. She caught both Buckhannon and the trunk; they tripped, they whirled, and were caught by the stairs.

It was all involuntary. Nature plays such tricks. But Buckhannon was aware of the lithe and supple body that half-supported him, of its strength and heat and fragrance. He was trained to plastic apprehension—contour, shadow, and mass.

"You foolish boy!" breathed Mme. Janesco, and there was a vibrancy back of the breath—very slow, like one of those tones too deep for the human ear to register. "You might have killed yourself!" But she was making no effort to release herself.

"Are you hurt?" asked Buckhannon. He was panting a little. Unless she did help him, he would be unable to release himself, or her, without further involuntary but violent contact. He and the trunk and the newel-

Mme. Delilah and—

post and Mme. Jenesco and the lower step all appeared to be tangled up together.

"I'm not hurt," laughed Mme. Jenesco.

He made an effort—but he had to press against her to make it—and managed to set the trunk on end. In a moment he was free.

Now he was very sober. He was all the more sober in that some instinct was telling him that he had enjoyed this accident and that so had Mme. Jenesco and that the two of them were glad of the enjoyment.

"I think that, after all," he said, "if you were to take the front end and I took this, most of the weight would be down."

She also tried to be sober, but she smiled. She caught her end of the trunk. He saw the curve and resiliency of her hips as she lifted the weight as easily as any man could have done it. And after that they were plodding up the stairs.

"What if Mélissine—what if Mélissine——"

But not even in the privacy of his own thought would Buckhannon complete the accusation that his half-formed question implied. They went through the dusk of the upper hall to the front room on the second floor. There was no mistaking it. This was the room of honor.

"Miss Tyrone wanted you to have this room," said Buckhannon, and he was ready to retreat.

"Sit down and catch your breath," she said. "You don't have to run away."

Now he felt like a prig. It would have been worse yet to obey that priggish instinct to run away. So he

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sat down and looked about him. It was a lovely room. There was a four-poster in it to win the admiration of any budding architect, and the measurements of the room were as if balanced to this, the decorations as if inspired by it—a sampler, a few French colored prints, a rare and beautiful old wall-paper of delicate hues and widely flowing composition. There was much to look at. It gave Buckhannon an excuse to keep his eyes diverted from Belle for the few moments he intended to remain.

But again nature had her way.

Without thought—or consciousness even of any discomfort—he had started to rub his elbow.

"You hurt yourself," said Belle.

"No, no!"

"I'm sure that you did. Let me see!"

And then there was nothing for it but that he take off his coat and roll up his sleeve to show her that nothing was wrong. The skin had been rubbed from his elbow for a square inch or so, and he had never suspected it. Now he couldn't go!

Belle had her trunk open in a jiffy. She found a bottle she sought. What she needed was something that could be used as a bandage. She tossed her lingerie about—all lace and pale little ribbons and gauzy tissues, exquisitely fine and clean—and this also exhaled a perfume through the room.

"I'll get this boy," Mme. Jenesco whispered to herself. "I'll have him for myself."

CHAPTER XXXIII

—THE TEMPTING OF SAMSON

AH, no!" Buckhannon exclaimed, as Belle gripped some garment or other and tore a strip from it.

His exclamation seemed to amuse her. She confronted him with a smile. "It was an old thing anyway," she said. And there was a quite evident tenderness in her smile as she considered his slightly damaged arm. Buckhannon had got to his feet and had thrust his arm forward, honestly anxious to have the ordeal over with as soon as might be. But Belle would not have it this way.

"Sit down again," she said, and she lightly pushed him into the chair. In an instant she was kneeling in front of him.

This day was warm. Belle was as diaphanously clad as any woman had a right to be. She had tossed her hat and her gloves aside at once on entering the room.

Buckhannon looked down on her darkly russet hair, her rounded shoulder. He had never noticed before how clean she was and how perfect physically. Her arms and hands were very fine. He found all this touching, for he guessed that she had been poor and that there had been more tragedy in her life than happiness. He

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admired her. He felt sorry for her. It gave him a queer mingling of remorse and desire when he thought that this woman had kissed him, and that now she was—for want of a better expression—"binding up his wounds."

She was very attentive about her task. She poured peroxide on the injured place, then deftly bandaged it with the thin stuff of the torn garment.

"This is too kind of you," he said.

"It's you who are kind, and was kind," she said, frankly clinging to his bare forearm with her soft, strong fingers. She looked at him, and her smile had as if retreated. "If every one was as kind as you——"

"Oh, you mean about the trunk. Why you——"

"That isn't what I mean."

"Then what?"

"You never told them," she said.

"Never told them what?"

"About—that first time we saw each other. You know!" Now she smiled a little, but her mood continued sober. "You won't ever tell them, will you, dear?"

There was just a touch of the motherly in her use of the "dear," enough to let it pass without suspicion, and yet with an after-flavor to it of something else.

"Of course I won't," said Buckhannon.

"I couldn't help it," said Belle, softly. "I sort of felt that you were going to get yourself in bad."

"How do you mean?"

She didn't answer at once. There were no tears in her deep eyes, but there was an expression of tears

—*The Tempting of Samson*

about her highly expressive mouth. She gave a single slight toss of her head as if she and her own griefs were not worth considering.

"I wouldn't have you undergo all that I've suffered on account of this house"—her voice began to break a little—"not for a thousand—no, nor for a million—dollars I wouldn't," she said. And she put her cheek against Buckhannon's arm, hiding her head against his knees. Her shoulders began to shake—in spite of her manifest efforts to keep them still.

"Belle," said Buckhannon.

She did not reply.

"Belle, listen! Everything's going to be all right now. I know a little of what you've been up against. But that's all over now. I heard Mélissine talking about it to—to Mr. Partridge. He's just like a member of the family, you know, and he's as good as anybody. He's a darn sight better than most people I've ever met. And you're all going to live here together."

"But it's on your account," said Belle.

"How, on my account?"

"That's just it. You're so young, and innocent, and everything, and you don't know what *you're* up against."

"I'm not so young, and I'm not so innocent," Buckhannon began.

"But you *are*."

"What makes you say that? And what is it that I'm up against? Go on, tell me!"

Belle turned slightly, but she drew Buckhannon's bare arm with her, over her shoulder, against her neck. She

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appeared lost in reflection, she was debating with herself.

"I suppose you've heard some of the things that have been said about this house," she said, wistfully. "You must have heard enough to warn any ordinary man. But you're not ordinary. You're so young, and romantic, and generous. You're an artist. I suppose nothing would make any difference to you, anyway; and after all——"

She paused again to reflect.

"I want you to go ahead and tell me what you know," said Buckhannon. "I tell you, I'm no kid." He tried to make her smile again. "What's the matter? Can't you trust me?"

"I can't trust myself," she murmured. "I can't trust others." She turned. She was on her knees again. Her face was close to his. All her movements were so smooth and quick that there was never time to parry, even where there was a will to parry. "It's you who are too trustful," she said. "Do you really believe that thing about Partridge being my father?"

"Why—since you speak about it," he stammered.

"You don't believe it. Tell me you don't."

"Why, no; of course not."

She whispered, but her voice continued warmly vibrant—like notes on the *d*-string of a violin.

"Hasn't Partridge ever told you about some mystery—some mystery that he wouldn't have poor little Mélis-sine learn about—not for worlds?"

"Something like that," said Buckhannon softly.

—*The Tempting of Samson*

"Haven't you guessed what it is?"

"No; I didn't care."

Something in his tone warned her to plead, so she pleaded. "Oh," she said, "I know that you think I shouldn't say anything about it. And I suppose I hadn't ought to. But you know—don't you, dear?—that I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't care for you so much. But I do care for you. You know that. Don't you, dear? I've cared for you from the very first time that I ever saw you. And I've wanted so to shield you, and protect you from pain."

She put her hand against his cheek and caressed him, and Buckhannon, feeling guilty but doing it anyway, put his free hand on her shoulder.

"I appreciate it," he said. "I'm just as grateful as I can be. I think you're mighty beautiful and good."

"You're nothing but a child," she said; "a dear, sweet, innocent child, who wouldn't think bad of anybody no matter what they did." She playfully pressed his face against her own. She murmured that he was a darling.

"What was that thing you were going to tell me?" Buckhannon asked. There was an obsession of anxiety in his mind that blurred all else. What was she hinting at? He was ashamed of himself for wanting to know. He felt that he must know. He would make her tell.

But Belle was again deep in reflection. At any rate, she was silent.

"Tell me," he said.

She still took her time. Her breath traveled lightly

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over Buckhannon's cheek and neck, giving him tiny recurrent spasms of gooseflesh.

"Did Partridge ever tell you?" she asked, almost inaudibly, "anything about Méliissine's mother?"

"No."

"You knew that she was a French actress?"

"Yes, but——"

"There, I've hurt you," said Mme. Jenesco. She clasped him about the neck, not savagely, but tenderly. Her eyes were very close to his. Her lips were almost touching his lips. "Do you suppose," she said, "that I could talk to you like this and take all this risk if I didn't love you so?"

"I don't know yet what it's all about," said Buckhannon, desperately.

"That's because you—you don't know yet the meaning of passion," said Mme. Jenesco; "just plain, old-fashioned passion, the greatest thing in the world—when it's real. You darling, when it *is* real, why, it'd even change a thing like Partridge into a man. It would've—twenty years ago. *Can't* you understand?"

Buckhannon got to his feet. His mind was in a daze. He couldn't—he wouldn't—understand.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WOMAN! WOMAN! WHO ART THOU?

EVENTS were to carry Eugene Buckhannon to his home in Tennessee. He had to go out there to see his people. He wasn't the boy to do anything in secret. Neither was he, for the matter of that, one to let his family interfere in an affair of heart and conscience. But he wanted to see his family. He had to see them. He had to withdraw—as one might to a monastery or any other retreat—where it would be possible to meditate, meditate with his feet sound-planted on familiar rock.

It was a long ride to Tennessee—twenty-four hours in the fastest express he could get out of New York—and ordinarily this interval would have served the purposes of reflection as a preliminary to wider broodings later on.

But it was not to be so for him. Through the long ride his brain was feverish. He was haunted by feverish broodings. Visions came to keep him company.

He sat by his window. He spoke to no one. He heard no thing that was said about him. His optic nerve did respond to the mountains, the rivers, the fat farms, and the smoking cities that constituted his own, his na-

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tive land. The ears of his head did record an occasional request for tickets, or a call to the dining-car—things like that. But these were not really the things that he saw and heard.

Almost all the time it was Cinnamon Street that stretched its vista away before the eyes of his mind, and old No. 6, and the dark mysteries of it—Partridge and Belle and the late Nathan Tyrone, the chapel in the graveyard next door; these, and then Paris—especially Paris aswoon in the gold and blue of an autumn sunset, Seine all shimmering, Notre Dame rearing aloft like God's own footstool! or the interior of Notre Dame—dim and sonorous with holy light and sound, where he and Mélissine held silent, enchanted conversation. And Mélissine was the greatest mystery of all.

The marvel of Mélissine was strong upon him. Eyes open or eyes closed, he could see her. She was a presence even in his sleep; for he had reached that state of concentrated interest where the mind refuses to let go. A very dangerous state of mind—one accountable for obsessions, genius, and lunacy—but happily in most cases soon ended.

But there was obsession here for Buckhannon now. There often is when a youth is very much in love. The wild elk that runs across vast stretches of savage mountain to seek his mate and gives no thought to drink and food has his human counterpart. There is the same fierceness, the same readiness to fight anything under heaven, the same frantic unrest.

Buckhannon felt this frantic unrest. He had a tor-

Woman! Woman! Who Art Thou?

turing sense that the world was wrong and that he would have to set it right. It couldn't be right until he was happily married to Mélissine and settled down. But could this ever be? Wasn't love and marriage a terrible adventure under even the most favorable conditions, when there was no temperament to speak of?

No, not always.

Just across the aisle from where he sat there was a dowdy, placid couple, fat and middle-aged, with a fat and sticky child who squirmed and whined and made life a misery for all about him except the parents themselves. How fortunate these people were, Buckhannon opined. What mystery had ever beset this woman? What fiery torment had ever driven this man to a wild-stag charge across untamed mountains?

But, now that he thought of it, there were quite a few Buckhannons living in the home county who themselves were married. Subconsciously he knew that these were men and women like himself, too—fighters and marauders, lovers of beautiful mates, dreamers of dreams, takers of chances. They were not like this couple across the aisle. And yet they also were happily married. They also were substantial, placid to a degree. They had weathered the storm of marriage, whatever it was. Nothing had happened to them either, seemingly, but parenthood.

The thought consoled him to some extent. Some of these relatives of his had traveled far for wife or husband. There had been romance all right. And physical beauty graded high in the Buckhannon clan.

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Time enough that he should get into the sure sanity of the home of his youth. His mother was there to greet him. It struck him with a species of wonder that once she had been a girl and that his father had come courting her. Here were the other Buckhannons. All of these loved him as simply and naturally, and as deeply, as they loved America and God. But to none of these good people, whom Buckhannon himself so deeply loved, could he say a word about the tremendous adventure upon which he was embarked.

Even when his mother reflected aloud on the fine qualities of this or that girl of the neighborhood he had nothing to say. Not along those lines. He talked about his career. He wanted to become the greatest architect that the world had ever known. He had a great tenderness for his mother. But he was not the kind to consult her on a question like this. Anyway, he would not have troubled her for anything in the world. And this story of his would have troubled her. She could not have understood. He himself could not understand.

He walked. He fished. He rode a little. He drove his brother's second-best car over many a lonely mile. Here were grass and trees whose very smell was a language that spoke of old hopes and ambitions and revived the splendid, tender mysteries of adolescence. Here were the roads and the dreams he had followed in his earlier day, when all of life that lay ahead of him was dimly visioned as the thing that life had become for him now—haunted, beautiful, full of undefined perils.

What were these perils?

Woman! Woman! Who Art Thou?

He tried to tell himself that there were none. But the conviction persisted. Perils there were.

More and more insistently his mind reverted to the time when he had come into the hall of No. 6 Cinnamon Street with Méliissine and old Goodenough—Goodenough bringing with him, as from one poet to another, that touching and beautiful tribute of his, the wreath of immortelles.

One would have said that there couldn't have been an occasion more provocative of peace and good-will.

And yet there was the scene he had witnessed:

Partridge standing there with a clinging hand on the draperies, looking like a man who had been frozen to death in a moment of alarm; and then Mme. Jénesco standing over there, distilling from her presence a he-knew-not-what of red mirth, a sort of scarlet merriment.

The scene had subtly shifted:

There was Mme. Jénesco staring at old Goodenough, and old Goodenough staring at Mme. Jénesco. A quaver of candle-light, a coagulation of shadows—these creatures themselves a mere quaver of candle-light and coagulation of shadows. There was something about it all to remind him of Amy Lowell's description in "The Crossroads":

"He wavers like smoke in the buffeting wind. His fingers blow out like smoke, his head ripples in the gale . . . he stands, and watches another quavering figure drifting down the Wayfleet road . . ."

There had been that tense moment—only a moment, but sufficient to furnish a memory that might be ever-

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lasting; then he and Mélissine and Goodenough had gone through the hall to the place where Goodenough had deposited his wreath and also a tear or two.

Mme. Jenesco, like a sable ambassadress from some Court of Shadows, was there for the funeral. She was there like Delilah—like Lilith—before he left for Tennessee. Always flitting, always mysterious, seductive, vicious, sympathetic, always suggestive of dark and lurid secrets, unexplained—except possibly to Partridge. Who was she? What was she? Where did she come from?—and why?—and, God in heaven!—what *had* she meant when she spoke with reference to Mélissine?

CHAPTER XXXV.

CROSS-EXAMINED

BUCKHANNON might have been more troubled yet had he known how events at No. 6 Cinnamon Street were shaping themselves. More than ever No. 6 had become the house of a bad name. For now the Woman in Black had come to live there. Almost every day they could see her come and go—the druggist could, and Jerome Hickcock the Cop, and Tony Zamboni and his people, they who believed in the Evil Eye. Only for Goodenough, the poetic cabby, did the old place appear to have become something finer, something gentler. Or, perhaps, the old place had always been something fine and gentle for Goodenough—for that part of Goodenough, at least, which did not drink—the part of him that loved weird verse and mooned over the moss-grown tombstones in the chapel-yard.

“For the love of Mike,” says Hickcock, “and what’s this I hear?”

“And what is it that you have heard?” demands Goodenough.

“Your goin’ into that place.”

“It was to honor the dead.”

“If I’d have thought of it, I’d have tried it myself,” and Hickcock displays a glint of cunning envy.

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"It's not too late. I'll show you where he was buried."

"I'm not talkin' about that. It's about gettin' into the house I'm talkin' about. I've been lookin' for the chance these seventeen years. Go on. Slip me an earful."

"I'll slip you an earful—a dead man with a smile on his face, the picture hanging on the wall of a woman who smiles back at him. And isn't that the end of all life, no matter how full of trouble it has been?"

"Go on, you old rummy; tell me about the little blonde and the Woman in Black."

"They're both women—mortal women—who yesterday were angels unsullied and unborn and who to-morrow will return to the bright ethereal region whence they came."

All of this is above Hickcock's head.

"I know this," he says. "If I had my way, I'd back up the wagon to the front door of the old dump and I'd give them all a ride. There has been somethin' crooked about that bird-cage all along. It's gettin' worse."

Which shows that even men like Jerome Hickcock may be partly right. Even Partridge would have agreed with him in one respect:

Things were getting worse.

"Do you love me? Will you love me always?"

This from Mme. Jenesco, one day after Buckhannon had disappeared on his visit home. Into this sudden and chasmic void in Mélissine's life Mme. Jenesco had come. Mélissine had happened on Mme. Jenesco and Partridge in the drawing-room of No. 6 quite by acci-

Cross-Examined

dent. It was evident to MéliSSine that they had been talking again about serious things, just as they had been the first time that she had seen them together—Partridge pale and troubled, Mme. Jenesco somehow appearing now as a consoler. MéliSSine had asked Partridge what the trouble was, but Partridge couldn't or wouldn't tell.

"You may leave us," said Mme. Jenesco to Partridge.

Partridge bowed his head and left; with one lingering glance at MéliSSine. And this time MéliSSine had remained there alone—alone for the first time—with the Woman in Black. She wasn't the Woman in Black for MéliSSine, but she nonetheless was a creature of mystery, alluring as all mysteries are. Also there was a fragrance about Mme. Jenesco, and a warmth, and that lithe animal beauty that made her attractive from a purely physical standpoint—an attraction that MéliSSine couldn't have explained at all, any more than a child could explain the attractiveness of a strong, lithe cat; any more than a woman, perhaps, could explain the fascination of smooth, animal-tainted furs. Atavism, maybe.

So far as MéliSSine was concerned, this fascination was immeasurably increased when she felt Mme. Jenesco's arms about her, when she became conscious, vividly and immediately, of Mme. Jenesco's softness, warmth, perfume, strength, her tingling magnetism; also something of her greater maturity, her possession of secret wisdom, her familiarity with the world as the world existed outside of No. 6 and MéliSSine's ken.

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"Do you love me? Will you love me always?" Mme. Jenesco asked.

Mélistine's first answer had been merely an answer of the eyes. With Mme. Jenesco's arms about her she had looked up into Mme. Jenesco's face. Like *Little Red Riding Hood*, Mélistine might have said: "How black your eyes are! How red your mouth is!" But of this no hint in Mélistine's eyes.

"I do love you," said Mélistine. "I am sure that I shall love you always."

For a moment or longer, Mme. Jenesco's red, red lips breathed on Mélistine's temple—a hot and agitated breath that blew into Mélistine's innermost being a vague trouble.

"Has Partridge told you anything about why I had decided to come here to live?" Belle asked.

"No." But Mélistine colored slightly.

"You've guessed."

"I understood—but this would make me love you if nothing else did—that you were his daughter."

There was a silence.

"You're very fond of Partridge, ain't you, dear?"

"Yes."

"Has Partridge talked very much to Mr. Buckhan-non?"

"I suppose so."

"Told him everything?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Haven't you ever wondered why you were brought

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up so strange? You know—not like other girls—kept to yourself, and everything like that.”

“I never did wonder about it. I supposed it was because father wished it that way. He kept to himself—never went with other men. We were happy together. He was always so kind, so considerate. For a while we lived in a house in the country, over in France; and after that I was in a convent for a good many years. So I never had the chance to go about very much. I was happy. I’ve been happiest of all while I was living here, and he was alive.”

“And Partridge; where was he all this time?”

“Always there,” said Melissine; “even more than my father was, for Partridge didn’t have any literary work to think about. Dear old Partridge! Why, I even knew him and loved him before I loved my father. I can remember yet, when I was a little, little girl, and old Partridge would come to see me—so tender, so kind——”

“Did he ever tell you about your mother?”

“Who? Partridge? Oh, yes! He used to tell me how much I was like her, everything like that.”

“He told you that he—was in love with her? I mean—that he loved her very much?”

“I know that he must have been devoted. He couldn’t have been anything else. Why do you ask?”

Belle devoted several seconds to thought. Méliissine stirred uneasily. Méliissine got up and went over to the door. She listened there—perhaps as a pretense to cover some thinking of her own. “I thought I heard

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him call," she said. Her eyes sought Mme. Jenesco's, but Mme. Jenesco looked away.

"We were talking about Partridge being my father," said Mme. Jenesco, guardedly. "How would you feel—if he were yours?"

"How would I feel—if Partridge were *my* father?"

"Yes!"

"How absurd!"

"Well, how would you feel about it?"

That was a poser, and Mélissine had to think; but not for long. "I'd feel that I had one of the finest fathers in the world," she said, without reservation.

"Even if he *is* a servant?"

"That's no disgrace. He's been a good servant. More than that, he's been a trusted friend."

"I know," said Belle. "That sounds good. But what would Mr. Buckhannon think about it? And what would that swell family of his think about it? How would they like to have him marry the daughter of a servant? And do you think it'd be fair to him to let him do it?"

CHAPTER XXXVI

MME. JENESCO GENERALIZES

THEY went over and sat down together on a high-backed sofa. Mme. Jenesco appeared to be as deeply fascinated with Méliissine as Méliissine was with Mme. Jenesco. The elder woman couldn't keep her eyes from Méliissine's face, now—her hair, her clothing; or her hands either, for that matter. All the time that they were sitting there together Mme. Jenesco was stroking Méliissine's floss of curls, embracing Méliissine's tender shoulders, partaking of Méliissine's special atmosphere much as a lioness in the desert might savor for the first time the soul-upsetting spoor of a man. There was that same suggestion of a luxurious delight—of a delight hued with a curious wonder—of aroused appetite, or call it ambition, that the creature of a lower order may feel on the trail of something higher.

"I don't know about Mr. Buckhannon's family," said Méliissine; "but I don't think it would make any difference with Mr. Buckhannon himself. He thinks as much of Partridge as I do. And, anyway, what difference do such things make so long as people love each other?"

She spoke with a sort of panting effort.

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"Is he the first one you were ever in love with?" Mme. Jenesco inquired.

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"What do you mean?" Méliissine interpreted the look in her eyes. "How could I have loved any one else? There is only one of him. How could there ever be any other than a first? No girl could love a boy, and then love some other boy afterward."

"Poor little goose," Mme. Jenesco exclaimed. She was so deeply moved that she was half-way between laughter and tears. "Poor little goose! For God's sake, where did you get that? You make me think I was just about due. Why, something terrible might have happened to you. Don't you know anything at all?"

"I know that love is a power for good," said Méliissine steadily.

"Who told you that, this young Buckhannon?"

"I didn't have to be told. It's in every book I've ever read. And now I have felt it in myself—oh, a power to perform miracles."

"Don't you believe it," said Mme. Jenesco.

"Oh, you mean—that it isn't so?"

"You said it."

"But you couldn't have known—cannot know—what love is."

"Isn't she the sketch?" demanded Mme. Jenesco of an unseen audience. "Listen, silly! There's nothing in all this love-talk. Not know what love is? No woman knows better. Oh, I know it's sweet to be in love with

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some nice, handsome boy—especially when it's the first time, like you say it is with you. But even that sort of love is just an accident. When it isn't Dick, it's Ed; and when it isn't Ed, it's Jim—one at a time, or even all together. I know what I'm talking about, dearest."

And there was something like real affection in the way Mme. Jenesco pressed Mélissine's head to her bosom.

"No! No! No!" panted Mélissine, but she left her head where it was the better to hide her troubled face.

"They're all alike," said Mme. Jenesco soothingly. "Mind you, I'm not saying anything against this Buckhannon boy of yours. Money isn't everything. Looks count for something. But it's money in the long run. It is for us girls. That's all we ever get out of it. Understand me, sweetheart. I know what I'm talking about. It's the good old coin that counts. I know! I know! You're young. I was young like you myself, once. I had the same sort of ideas. And I'm not saying now that a little love doesn't help."

Mélissine drew back a little. "Helps!" she exclaimed soberly. "Love's everything."

Mme. Jenesco tossed her head. She saw that it was no use arguing with the child—not along this line. But she undertook a fresh line.

"Do you suppose," she said, "that Mr. Buckhannon—what's his name, Eugene?—do you suppose that 'Gene feels the same way as you do about it?"

"Yes."

"And that he's never loved any girl but you?"

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"Yes."

"And do you think that all men are pure and straight, and all that sort of bunk?"

"I don't think that you should call it 'bunk.'"

"Well, call it by any name you want to, sweetheart. Don't you think that men are men, and have their little love affairs on the side, and like a little change now and then?"

Mélistine didn't shift her position immediately, but she was freezing.

"I know they used to be like that," she said, in a small but steady voice. "And I suppose that some still are like that. I've read a lot. Judge Bancroft, even, has said something like that in a book—a law-book—that he wrote and gave to grandfather." Mélistine said this, apparently, in some vague effort to justify Mme. Jenesco's speech in her own judgment. "But all men are not like that."

"Oh, ain't they!"

"No."

"Well, I'd like to hear of one who wasn't."

"There's my father," said Mélistine. "And there's Partridge." Her lip was quivering. She desisted. It was painful for her to discuss such matters. She would have liked to add the name of Buckhannon to her calendar of saints. But Mélistine had said enough.

"Your father," said Belle; "and Partridge!" She paused on the point of saying something, changed her mind. "Did you ever wonder," she asked, "why this old house has a bad name in the neighborhood?"

Mme. Jenesco Generalizes

"Has it got a bad name?"

"I'll say it has! You never noticed how everybody stares?"

"I thought," said Mélissine, "it was just because—just because—we were different."

"Maybe," said Belle, "it was because you *weren't* so different—the men, I mean. That's what I've been talking about. Listen, sweetheart, I wouldn't hurt you for the world. I love you just as much as if I was you and you was me—if you get what I mean."

"But I don't get what you mean," said Mélissine, getting to her feet and moving away. But she was careful to make her withdrawal appear unconscious, unpremeditated. "I've scarcely understood a word of all the things you've said since we were here together. I don't want to talk about people, and to say that they're bad when they're not. I'm just as glad to have you here as I can be. I love Partridge and I want you both to be happy. That was why I was so glad to have you come here to live; but I want to be glad on my own account, too——"

"You'll learn," said Mme. Jenesco, complacently.

"There are things that I don't want to learn," Mélissine retorted, warmly.

"But there are things that we all have to learn," Mme. Jenesco replied without heat. "We all have times when we dream. Sooner or later we all have to get waked up. And it does hurt, sometimes. I'll say it does. I know. But the sooner we're waked up the sooner we get wise, and there's something in that."

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Partridge appeared just then at the door. Partridge was white and tremulous.

"Luncheon is served," he said.

Mme. Jenesco smiled. She hummed a tune. She arose gracefully and slipped her arm about Mélissine's slim waist.

CHAPTER XXXVII

“AND ON MY SERVANTS——”

I HAD thought,” said Partridge, when he and Méliissine were alone that evening, “that possibly you would like to go away to a school—a finishing school. I have heard of such—where young ladies go—chiefly, I believe, to profit by the society of other young ladies.”

“And leave you?” cried Méliissine. Her voice was as soft and warm as the candle-light, and had the same sort of flicker in it.

“Yes. I am used to that.”

“And you really wish me to?”

“I think, if you will permit me——”

Partridge wavered. He brought a water carafe and would have filled Méliissine’s glass. But Méliissine caught him by the wrist. Their eyes met. A most extraordinary scene for one not aware of all the circumstances—Méliissine at her dinner, alone; Partridge, the old butler, waiting on her with all formality. Partridge had cooked this omelet as well as served it. Partridge had bought the milk that filled Méliissine’s other glass. A great stickler for form was Partridge. Not for the world would he have seated himself at table with Miss Tyrone—not during the formal dinner hour.

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Now, here was his mistress, great-grand-child of the first Tyrone he had ever served, holding him by the wrist, flaming affection up at him.

"Don't you believe in me any more? Don't you want to have me with you any more? Don't you like me any more?"

Partridge waited with mellow patience until she loosed him. So would he have waited had she been six, or twenty-six. She released his wrist. He filled her water-glass.

"I think, if you will permit me," he proceeded, "it would be better if you were to have a change."

"It looks," she said whimsically, "as if I were to get about all the change I need right here—now that we have Mme. Jenesco. She wanted me to go out with her to-night to dinner and a theater. That *would* have been a change." She was aware that Partridge wasn't happy. She wished to console and encourage him. "She's a fine woman. Why didn't you ever tell me that you had such a daughter? Why didn't you bring her here before?"

"I—there are certain things——"

"Certain things that make you unhappy?" asked Mélissine.

"Your father's death——" Partridge evaded.

Mélissine may not have known any part of what was troubling Partridge, but she knew pretty well how to behave. She left her place. She walked around abruptly to the other side of the table whither Partridge had retired. She put her hands on his shoulders. At that

"And on My Servants——"

moment Partridge looked so shrunken that MéliSSine loomed almost large. Very large she may have loomed to Partridge.

"Whatever troubles you troubles me," she said. "Do you suppose that there is anything that could ever destroy my love for you, or my faith in you, or for the things that have always had my love and my faith, and those things that shall have them always?"

Partridge would have spoken, but his effort was too weak to stem MéliSSine's impetuosity.

"Do you suppose I didn't notice—don't fib—how distressed you have been of late? Don't tell me what it is, unless you want to. I don't care. Not unless caring can help you. Can it?"

"What, miss?"

"What, my little MéliSSine? Say it!"

"What——"

"My little MéliSSine," MéliSSine commanded. "Shall I ever be anything but your little MéliSSine for you? Will you ever be anything but my dear old Grandy? Now, say it!"

"Ah," said Partridge, "I wish—you were still little."

"I am," she said. "If you don't look out I'll begin to cry. And then, you know that you will be the only one who can make me stop. Will it help you any to tell me what it is that worries you so?"

"It is nothing," said Partridge. "Only, I was of the opinion that it would be better were you to seek one of these finishing schools—or perchance to travel——"

MéliSSine studied him with calm and searching eyes.

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She had a knack of reading the general lines of Partridge's thought if not the complex detail of it.

"You want to get me away from here?"

"I thought——"

"Is it because of some danger that threatens me?"

"A change——"

"Or you?"

She was so close to his thought that Partridge could neither deny nor evade.

"Is this connected with Mme. Jenesco?"

Partridge was in a misery, physical and mental, as he made his confession:

"I suppose you might say—it is."

"It is because of something she is—or knows?"

Partridge shook slightly. To him there was nothing uncanny in the girl's close guessing. She knew him well. She was a Tyrone as well.

"And you're afraid of her?" MéliSSine pursued.

"This," said Partridge, with the will to deny, "is most distressing."

"Oh, don't be frightened," MéliSSine pleaded; "and don't be worried. Listen! I'll tell you a secret. I've known for years that this dear old home of ours has been looked at with suspicion by every one in the neighborhood—that they think it is haunted, or something, or worse than that something. Yet we know, don't we?"

In Partridge's eyes—there for a quavering second or two—was the message that there were things—that there was one thing, above all—that MéliSSine did not know. He seemed to be on the verge of telling her what it was.

"And on My Servants——"

And this was something that did not have to do with Mme. Jenesco, or Mme. Jenesco's threats at all.

But could he tell her this thing that he had kept from her father? Could he tell her this thing that would humble her pride—make Nathan Tyrone himself even now turn in his grave? There arose before those troubled, groping eyes of the old butler the spectral effigies of the Tyrones he had served—proud, reserved. Mélissine—ah, Mélissine was all tenderness, affection, and faith. But she also was proud. No! He would rather die than tell even her.

"Let Mme. Jenesco stay here if she wants to," said Mélissine. "She fascinates me. She says that there is some sort of a bond between us. Maybe there is. But this is what I feel. I feel, somehow, as if Mme. Jenesco, herself, were secretly unhappy, that she needs us."

All this without other knowledge than the knowledge of the heart. It made Partridge recall something he had read of a time when servants and handmaidens should receive of the spirit of prophecy.

But there was a fighting strain in Partridge, nevertheless—something perhaps that had come to him in the days of Grant and Lee and which he had never lost.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AS BETWEEN MAN AND MAN

JUDGE BANCROFT was familiar with the secret which was at once the strength and the weakness of the Tyrone butler. Judge Bancroft was the one person on earth who did know it other than Partridge's self. The judge had shared it with Partridge from the first, and abetted him in it even, albeit the judge had shaken his head, looked forward—with his shrewd old-lawyer eye—to the time when the whole thing would have to come out.

"I've seen them try to keep their secrets," said the judge. "I've seen them struggle to take their secrets with them to the grave. No use. Even if they did take their secrets with them to the grave, the grave spoke a little later on. It all comes out—this man has been in jail, that man's first wife committed suicide, that one cheated his aunt, these twain were never united in holy wedlock, such another made his money defrauding Uncle Sam while Sam was fighting for his life. God have mercy on us all! Not that I am putting you in a class with the ordinary crooks, Partridge—not with the ordinary crooks!"

Judge Bancroft had another sort of eye than that

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old-lawyer eye of his. It was an eye for dahlias, and pansies, and landscapes. He had ceased to practice law these many years, and to indulge this other eye of his had gone to live in rustic splendor far out in a little-advertised section of Long Island.

Hither, after elaborate premeditation, Partridge made his way. Partridge had known the judge for the matter of half a century, just about, but nonetheless Partridge went in fear and trembling. He hated to intrude. He hoped that the judge would not be offended. He was tortured by the fear that the judge would refuse to see him at all; or would give him a curt dismissal after reminding him that years ago he, the judge, had told him, Partridge, that the truth would come out; or that the judge would merely give him a letter to some green young lawyer in town.

Oh, the situation was so delicate! It so impinged on the family honor! It was so hard to explain! To the world it never could be explained! The very soul of Partridge blushed when he thought of what Mme. Jenesco had threatened to do with regard to the Sunday newspapers!

And now what if the judge should rebuff him?

Partridge's fears in the latter respect were rather increased than lessened when he finally came in sight of the Judge's home—lonely neighborhood, expansive lawns, big houses set dimly far back from the street, a sense of wealth, of a privacy bought and paid for at high figures and not to be tampered with.

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"Are you sure that that is where Judge Bancroft lives?"

Partridge had made his inquiry of a whistling boy, and the boy was so simple and friendly that Partridge was stringing out the conversation for his own encouragement.

"Sure, he lives there," the boy replied. "I see him there myself to-day, a-workin' on his lawn."

That was encouraging. Now that Partridge remembered it, the judge always had professed a certain tenderness for grass and things. But so, as a matter of fact, had many an old man who could show himself fierce and cruel for human creatures.

Partridge went up the long walk toward the big house glimmering in the early night. He crossed a terror-inspiring expanse of dark porch. He rang the bell.

A neat maid had opened the door. She had smiled at him, and inquired his name, and Partridge had entered a roomy hall. And then, quite before he knew what was happening, there was the judge himself.

"God bless my eyes! Partridge! This is good! Give me your things! Come on in here where we can make ourselves at home!"

Partridge lost his breath. There was a distressful tightening about his throat. He faltered. He trembled. He laughed a little. He was so dazed that he would have started off in the wrong direction—following the maid to the kitchen, perhaps; but the judge was steering him right, his arm claspings Partridge's shoulders.

The judge conducted Partridge into an expansive

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room—part library, part living-room, well-lighted, magazines and papers lying about in a mere surface disorder amid what was obviously a very rich and very well-ordered home. The judge, stout, ruddy, strong, despite his age, busied himself at hauling two easy-chairs into position at the side of the large central table.

"Sit down!" he cried. "Sit down!" And he himself dropped into one of the chairs.

But Partridge remained standing. Partridge was frail. He looked very fine—in his best black coat, black stock, his immaculate collar flaring well up under his ears, and over his ears his silken white hair brushed forward in the style of another generation. But Partridge was the old servant, sir. He teetered a little. He clasped his hands. He had the air of saying: "Can I bring you anything else, sir?"

"Sit down, you old sinner!" softly roared the judge, and there was such authority, as of the court-room, in his voice that Partridge had to obey.

Partridge, however, sat on the edge of his chair. It was thus seated that he explained the purpose of his call—sketchily, uneasily—after the manner of his sitting down.

"There's always one way out of the situation," the judge exploded at last; "and that is for you to come out with the whole truth. And why shouldn't you? You've played your part. Confound it! You've held your peace now upward of twenty years. What if it does come out? It's nothing for you to be ashamed of—nothing for any one to be ashamed of. On the con-

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trary! Good Lord! When I think of some of the things that are being concealed! Why not out with it?"

"But Miss Tyrone, sir! She would have to know!"

The judge caught the quaver in Partridge's voice. His mood underwent a perceptible change.

"Partridge," he said, starting forward slightly, "suppose, before we go any further, we have a little nip." He clapped a hand on one of Partridge's knees. I've got something here I want you to try. Friend just sent it to me from the other side—a colleague of the wool-sack, Partridge—a good judge of other things than the British constitution, by George!"

Without waiting for Partridge's yes or no, the judge got up and went over to a remote corner of the room. When he returned he was bringing with him a small blue jug and two glasses.

"Rare stuff, Partridge," said the judge. He raised the jug to the light and read what was printed on it under the blue glaze:

*"Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary—
June 22, 1911."*

The judge tenderly extracted the crowned cork and decanted the liquor with reverent but cheerful concentration. He recorked the jug. Without a word he toddled off again, and this time when he returned he was opening a box of cigars.

Partridge had started to rise to his feet a number of times, but the judge had somehow held him where he was. This time Partridge was almost half-way to his feet.

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"Don't get up," said the judge. "Try one of these."

"Oh, thank you, sir. I can't permit you——"

"Would you like a smaller cigar?" bubbled the judge.

"These are mild. Maybe you'd prefer a panetela."

"These appear to be most excellent," said Partridge weakly.

But for him, Partridge, to be served like this by a gentleman—by a gentleman of the position of Judge Bancroft! No wonder that Partridge was overcome!

CHAPTER XXXIX

ON THE WINGS OF AN EAGLE

BUT the judge good-naturedly forced Partridge to accept a cigar. He insisted on holding the match while Partridge made a show of lighting it. The faint strands of blue smoke were as the vapors of magic for Partridge. He had come into a new world. When this world gradually adjusted itself about him he found that he was on a higher plane. The talk had reverted to the secret. Partridge found that he had the strength to maintain his view, even in the presence of such a personage, such a friend, as Judge Bancroft.

"I cannot—cannot let her know," said Partridge.

Judge Bancroft's cigar was drawing well. He had sipped his coronation liquor. He was settled deep in his chair. He was the judge again, "in chambers," mellow and human.

"In all the circumstances," he said slowly, "I hardly see how it could be avoided. It becomes a choice of two evils—call them evils. Either we must advise Miss Tyrone of the facts of the case or put up with this species of blackmail by the Jenesco woman. Mr. Nathan Tyrone, as you are aware, never took me into his confidence. What this Mme. Jenesco says about him and

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her mother may be so. She may be his daughter. Such instances are rather common. An ugly situation might develop if we took the matter into the courts. I speak, of course, of the way the situation might develop for—what is her name?"

"Mélissine, sir."

"Oh, yes! Mélissine! I remember now. She had read some of my law-books as I recollect—some old first editions that I had given to her grandfather. She struck me as an intelligent sort of person."

"She is, sir!" gasped Partridge fervently.

"Well, can't you take her into your confidence—tell her this secret of yours? She is fond of you."

"She has always been that, sir."

"She shouldn't have any objection to living on just as she has been. The truth won't hurt her."

"It would kill her, sir!" quavered Partridge.

Partridge's cigar had gone out long ago, but he raised it shakily to his lips and took it away again. He had raised his glass when the judge was drinking his health—his very good health—but he hadn't tasted the contents of it. The liquor was slowly evaporating, filling the air with a spicy sweetness. The judge grunted. Partridge pursued:

"It would kill her if she knew—as it would have killed her father. She also is a Tyrone. The Tyrones—they have been proud, they have been sensitive."

"The Tyrone pride!" the judge mused. "The Tyrone pride! The pride that goeth before a downfall. True, I had almost forgotten. It was this pride—the pride of

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my friend, Ulysses—and you remember how proud he was—too proud to mention the wound that was killing him—his pride that caused all the trouble in the first place. And Nathan had it—that pride. Otherwise I might have arranged matters while he was yet alive. And now——”

He blew a slow puff of smoke into the air. Partridge, bowed, studied his extinguished cigar with unseeing eyes.

“You say,” resumed the judge, “that MéliSSine appears to be happy in spite of the presence of this other woman in the house?”

“Oh, yes sir!” cried Partridge softly. “She is the kind to shed happiness about her. I—I suppose that I should be grateful. I am grateful. She is Faith! She is Hope! She is Charity!”

“Very beautiful!” intoned the judge. It is possible that Partridge’s tribute inspired the judge himself to think on a higher plane.

“Partridge, old friend,” he said, even more gently than he had hitherto spoken, “in the course of my long career—in the course of my own long career as a servant—that’s what we all long to be in the sight of the Lord, Partridge—good servants——”

“Yes, sir,” Partridge agreed with a touch of emotion.

“Ever and again occasions have arisen,” the judge went on, “where neither law nor worldly wisdom would suffice. You might say that such is ever the case in affairs that really matter—affairs of the heart and affairs of the spirit. This is one of those times. The law

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can't help us. The law is powerful. The law is supreme. But it is human. It is human in that it can do many things that it cannot undo."

Partridge got to his feet, feeling perhaps that he would be more comfortable like that; feeling also, perhaps, that he had taken enough of the judge's time. The judge also arose. He had tossed his cigar into an ash-tray. He looked at Partridge with a kindling smile. He put a hand on Partridge's shoulder.

"You and I are getting old, Partridge," he said. "We are about at an age when we can see the futility of much of human effort, the unnecessary of so much of the world's business, its scamperings, its worries, its strife. By and by, Partridge, you and I are going to step down and out—or up and out——"

"I have considered that, sir," said Partridge with a certain majesty.

"We know that when that does happen everything will be well—not only before the Lord—but in the eyes of the world."

"What more could we ask?" demanded Partridge softly.

"What more could we ask?" the judge echoed. "So let us simply bear with the situation for a while. It can hardly become worse unless we make it so. You say yourself that the situation is not altogether unbearable, either for yourself or for Miss Tyrone. It will be time enough to take more decisive steps should the Jenesco woman become recalcitrant."

"And in the meantime——"

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"Hold fast in the Faith," said the judge. "Hold fast in the Faith, as you have always done."

He himself saw Partridge to the front door—helping Partridge on with his coat, and handing Partridge his hat, his umbrella, and his gloves, even as Partridge might have done for the judge had the judge been the departing guest. The judge could have done no greater honor to any man. He invited Partridge to come out in the daytime so that he could show Partridge his new dahlia beds. And the judge's limousine was at the door, not merely to carry Partridge over to the station but all the way back to Cinnamon Street.

Curiously enough the motto on Méliissine's calendar for this day had been one of joy. And in the midst of his sorrow, Partridge had repeated it, and had tried to get into the spirit of it, and had failed. Now he repeated it again, and found that, after a fashion, the motto had been a prophecy. Over and over again he repeated it to himself while the big limousine spun away the swift, luxurious miles:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."

The movement of the limousine was so joyously soft and swift that it was almost as if he, Partridge, were mounted on the back of an eagle; and it was almost as if the eagle were bearing him up as well as on, higher

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and higher, above the clouds of fear and distress, until he was among the stars, and the prophecy of the morning had become a present conviction:

"Rejoice in the Lord—the Lord is at hand."

CHAPTER XL

THE LIGHT AT THE WINDOW

IT wasn't very late when the judge's limousine brought Partridge back to Cinnamon Street. It was at an hour when the rest of New York was asquirm and asquall and ashine almost as if it were noon—unwashed children still playing in the streets, shop-workers gadding about, theaters and restaurants, cheap and otherwise, each a human ant-heap.

But Cinnamon Street was dark. Tony Zamboni's grocery store gave off no other sign of human possession than a smell of cheese and faded fruit. The drug store was dark, except for a dim light that burned back of the blue-glass prescription counter—where one could imagine the druggist still furtively at work, doing things that he ought not to do. Elsewhere, gloom complete, even under the shuddering and frightened gas-lamps. The gas-lamps seemed to be ashamed. A lean cat slanted across the street.

And there, along the chapel fence where the shadows were deepest, stood Jerome Hickcock, the policeman, conversing with that other night-prowler, Goodenough.

A shake of subdued thunder, a majestic flood of light, and there was the big black limousine stopping in front of No. 6.

The Light at the Window

"And look at that!" cried Hickcock. "Now would you look at that. An auto! A closed one! A big one! Stopping in front of No. 6!"

Goodenough blinked. Said he:

" 'The night was lown and the stars sat still—' "

"For the love of Mike," breathed Hickcock. "It's *him*."

"Who?"

Hickcock had eyes that not only looked like the eyes of an owl. He had spent so much time in this street at night that his eyes were also like an owl's in that they could see in the dark.

"The dirty old sneak," he exclaimed. "At first," said he, "I was for thinkin' that it was Tyrone himself come back. You're to blame for that, you old rummy, with your talk of the spooks." He stared a little longer to make sure. He saw that the limousine had brought a single passenger, that this passenger now was saluting the chauffeur, thanking him, bidding him a good night and a safe return. "The dirty old sneak," breathed Hickcock again. "Who was it? And who else but Partridge?"

"You could hardly have expected him to call out me and the old roan at this time of night," said Goodenough.

"Three sixes—three zeros—a New York license," and Hickcock pawed out his note-book and entered the number of the strange car. It was while the auto filled the street with a subdued uproar as it backed and turned. "I'll put it over on them yet," said Hickcock. "But at that

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it would be my rotten luck for somethin' big to happen here the day they bury me. It's always been like that. When I was new on the force I watches a dock for three weeks steady. I gets a transfer. The very next day two children falls overboard there and McGuffy gets the medal. Can you beat it?"

"That may have been a doctor's auto he came back in," said Goodenough. It is possible that Goodenough was a little hurt, all the same, he had been furnishing the rolling-stock for this house so many years.

"Sure!" said Hickcock. "That's what I'm tellin' you. One of these days it'll be a murder in that old menagerie, and who will get the credit for it? You can damn well have the education, and you can damn well be faithful on your beat——"

"Like——" interposed Goodenough.

"Like me!" ground Hickcock. "Where has my education got me? What good has it done me to keep my eye on this old den of thieves and worse for close on to twenty years?"

"Aye," said Goodenough; "and you spoke a true word there."

"That's what I'm tellin' you. About the time that the coroner gets his case in there it'll be about the day after Jerome Hickcock's name appears on the pension-roll. Say, if they ever pull that on me, I'll come around here and clean up the place, sure enough, even if it gets me broke."

For the first time in his life Goodenough experienced a stir of interest in what Hickcock was saying to him.

The Light at the Window

"Just what is it," Goodenough inquired, "that you've got against the old place?"

"It's got a bad name," said Hickcock.

"I know it has; but why?"

"You ought to know."

"But I don't. Nobody knows. Nobody knows what has happened in there—what is happening now."

"What more do you want?" glowered Hickcock, taking a fresh grip on his nightstick as if he intended to beat Goodenough to death. As a matter of fact, Hickcock was as fond of Goodenough as he could be fond of any man. "The place is a secret. And tell me this: Do you see any neighbors runnin' in and out? You've been around them for years. What's their politics? Tell me that. What's their business? Who's the little blonde? Who's this Woman in Black?"

"I don't know," Goodenough reflected aloud. "But for less they've burned witches."

"That's what I'm tellin' you," said Hickcock. "There's something worse than witches the matter with that old kennel. Look now! Look at the candlelight goin' to the upper floor, and I bet it'll still be there when the sun comes up."

"Tut, tut!" said Goodenough. "Maybe he's merely praying late."

Old Goodenough, with his eye of a poet, his eye of the imagination, had discerned the truth. Up there where the dim light burned Partridge prayed. But even to one who saw him there with the physical eye would

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the fact have been concealed to some extent. For Partridge sat on the edge of his couch, face up, eyes wide—his face was strangely like that of an interested and attentive child. He was giving an account of himself apparently; also of his friends.

“Now, behold,” said he, “nothing ill can happen to me. I was in need of a friend, and Judge Bancroft—bless him, I beg of Thee—was moved to receive me in friendship. O God, thus receive Thou me, also!”

CHAPTER XLI

TOO MANY COOKS

LIKE that, Partridge slept for a number of hours as a child might sleep, with nothing in his consciousness but a knowledge of good and a vague dream of pleasant landscapes bathed in a celestial light. As often happens, it was with a slight shock when he awoke—when he found himself back on earth, in Cinnamon Street, in old No. 6, with all the earthly problems that were concentrated there.

Yesterday had been the eighteenth. Méliissine's calendar to-day reminded him that "the prayer of faith shall save the sick."

There was no immediate response from the depth of his heart. The depth of his heart was very deep—like a secret, hidden valley, with forested steeps about it—not a place for the early dawn to strike. But gradually, as he bathed and shaved and dressed himself, meditating betimes on the motto for the day, the sun must have climbed, so to speak; for, finally, there was a shaft of light striking down into that depth of gloom and darkness which was the bottom of the heart of an old man.

"The prayer of faith!"

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He had been feeling sick. He had a premonition that he was going to be healed.

He went down through the dark and silent house and back toward the kitchen. He paused in the butler's pantry when certain noises and a smell of coffee that reached him from the kitchen apprised him that some one had preceded him there.

Partridge almost wished that he had put on his coat instead of the apron he wore. He knew who was in there. He pushed open the swinging door in silence. He permitted himself a look—a long look. And to have seen him, one would have said that the sun was now altogether up, making the depths of his hidden valley of a heart to shine like the mountaintops.

Mélistine was there, housewifely in blue gingham. Her back was turned. Her blond curls were clustered over the back of her neck. She was arranging some breakfast things on a tray.

"Miss Mélistine!" called Partridge softly.

The girl whirled with a smile.

"Good morning, Grandy," she saluted him.

When Mélistine was a very small child she had fallen into the error of considering Partridge a grandfather—a grandfather of sorts, if not her own—because of his resemblance to a bonafide grandfather she had once seen, either in life or in a picture-book, no one remembered which. Hence the grand-daddy—hence the Grandy. Partridge loved the title. It had never ceased to touch softly some lute-string of his make-up.

Too Many Cooks

"You promised to let me get the breakfast this morning," Partridge said.

"I couldn't sleep any longer, and I couldn't stay in bed any longer," MéliSSine confessed with joyous complacency. "Life is so wonderful, I almost hate to go to sleep at all. And I just can't miss anything of the day. I wonder if Belle is up."

"Belle?"

"Mme. Jenesco! She told me that she wanted me to call her that."

"And what else did she tell you?" Partridge inquired softly, as he paid an apparent attention to the fire that MéliSSine herself had started in the range and to the coffee-pot on the back of the range.

"She said that she was going to be a sister to me," said MéliSSine, joyously. "No one—no one in the wide world—could do so well with a sister. Not just now."

"And why just now?" Partridge was bringing other porcelain from the closet.

"A sister to talk to—a woman to talk to! Dear Grandy! You were never a girl. You were never a girl engaged to be married! And a girl can't show her letters to another man—can she? Even if the other man is Grandy."

There was a lovely flush on MéliSSine's face. It contrasted with the shadow that had fallen across Partridge's heart. There had been a mistake somewhere in Nathan Tyrone's upbringing of MéliSSine. In her recent years she had been deprived almost entirely of feminine society of any kind. Never in her life had she had a girl

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friend. Partridge had never read Freud, but, nonetheless, Partridge had an instinctive knowledge of the accumulated force of suppressed desires. It must have been so that through the years of her life Mélissine had desired such companionship. Here, at last, was Mme. Jenesco to supply the vacancy.

A delicate situation! One to make Partridge grope—but grope upward like a man who drowns and can look to no earthly aid.

"So she said that she was going to be a sister to you," said Partridge. There was a little relief in that. She hadn't said yet definitely that she was Mélissine's sister—or that Mélissine's family name was Partridge either.

"I feel so grateful to her," said Mélissine. "I knew that I was right the other day when I said that it would be better to have her live with us—a mystery!—but such a charming mystery!"

Partridge was noncommittal.

Mélissine surveyed her breakfast tray, forgot it for a moment. She stepped lightly over to Partridge, rested her two hands on his shoulders in a gesture that had become dear and familiar to him. She sought to look into his eyes, but Partridge looked at the ceiling.

"It was perfectly dear of you to think of my going to a finishing school," she said. "But this is better yet. She knows so many things!" Partridge was uneasy, but he did not speak. "And I can talk to her about so many things that I could not possibly talk to you about—even if you are the dearest person in the world."

"What, for example," queried Partridge hoarsely.

Too Many Cooks

A lovely flush overspread Méliissine's upturned face.

"Marriage," she whispered. "You couldn't tell me very much about marriage; could you, Grandy dear? I love Eugene. He loves me. And I am just sure that he is going to be a perfectly wonderful architect some day—an Inigo Jones—a Viollet-le-Duc!"

Méliissine was prone to these digressions whenever Buckhannon's name came up.

"You were saying," Partridge reminded her, with his pale eyes now on the kitchen window.

"But everything—everything has made me think again and again of that first day—you don't mind my coming back to it, do you—and making me wish that you would tell me what it was all about."

Partridge was silent. Méliissine's voice took on a still deeper vibrancy of sympathy, not to say downright love. Partridge felt a tear creeping to the corner of his left eye, and he wished that he could have wiped it away; but he couldn't—not without betraying himself.

"Why," queried Méliissine, "why did you look so sad? Why did you look so white?"

She herself detected the telltale tear that Partridge would have suppressed. She reached down and got her own little cambric handkerchief, and she touched it to Partridge's eye—with a species of wonder.

"Why," said Partridge with a lurch, "it must have been on account of your father."

Rather dazedly he confronted Méliissine's pure-blue gaze.

"Grandy!"

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"Yes?" And Partridge managed a smile.

"I think that you are fibbing to me, Grandy."

"Oh, gracious!" And Partridge even managed something of the old-time playfulness that had been his when MéliSSine had used him in a variety of zoological rôles: horse, bear, roaring lion, et cetera. "Oh, gracious!" said Partridge, "and you don't think that I'd be guilty of that."

"It wouldn't be the first time"—seriously.

"And when was any other time?"

"The time that I asked you who Mme. Jenesco really was."

It looked as if the crisis had come. For all he knew, Partridge may have considered this as all in the divine plan; somewhat as if the prayer of faith had saved the sick, but that it was still necessary for the patient to swallow one more bitter dose.

But just when Partridge was calling on his soul for strength sufficient to the ordeal, he heard the voice of Mme. Jenesco herself. It must have been that Mme. Jenesco had heard at least a portion of the conversation—inadvertently, let us hope.

"And what did Grandy tell you when you asked him that?"

CHAPTER XLII

THE CUP OF BITTERNESS

BUT the crisis was again deferred for a time. This wasn't one of those spring thunder showers that come up in a minute and in a minute are gone—all to the accompaniment of a flood of sunshine and a singing of birds. This was one of those storms which, so to speak, have their origin in the spots on the sun—barometer falling day after day, small black cloud on the horizon getting constantly bigger, ground-swell under a glassy sea, air getting darker and darker, a few frightened gulls hurtling past.

"He didn't tell me anything," Mélissine answered the question that Mme. Jenesco had asked. She left Partridge and ran over to where Mme. Jenesco stood at the door. It showed how well established Mme. Jenesco was in the house that she should have appeared like this unannounced—especially in that most intimate quarter of the house, the kitchen. Mélissine kissed Mme. Jenesco on the cheek and allowed herself to be kissed. "He didn't tell me anything except that you were here for private reasons that had something to do with the family. You don't mind my having asked? I am so glad that you are here."

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There was a truthfulness about this, a limpidity and a warmth, that mere words cannot possibly convey. And there was almost a truce in the way that Mme. Jenesco looked at Partridge from beyond Mélissine's shoulder. Almost—as if the sun had managed to show itself in one last effort while the storm was piling up.

"If you will permit me," Partridge spoke up, "I shall serve breakfast immediately."

Mme. Jenesco was still the Woman in Black to some extent. Her kimono had a body of black, even if it was embroidered with blue and purple flowers of Japanese design. The kimono was useful. It commanded Mélissine's interest—an interest which Mme. Jenesco herself perforce must share. The clothes that Mélissine usually wore were almost as captivating to Mme. Jenesco as Mme. Jenesco's clothes were to Mélissine.

Partridge's suggestion won. Breakfast was served in a small bay, or sun-parlor, at the back of the house. The old man served. The lull lasted.

And then Mélissine, partly in response to the dictates of her own conscience, or her heart, and partly also in response to the suggestion of the mysterious friend who had come into her life—and who understood so perfectly how Mélissine felt—Mélissine ran off to write a line to Buckhannon. That meant that Mélissine was going to be gone long enough for a good deal of serious discussion among her elders, should her elders desire it.

Belle and Partridge were alone.

Partridge was not sure that he desired such a dis-

The Cup of Bitterness

cussion. He felt a little shaky in the legs. So must the Christian martyrs have felt in the arena at Rome. You may have all the spiritual strength in the world, but the flesh will shrink when the lions begin to roar and when the pitch-fire begins to smoke.

The latter figure is not entirely out of place. Mme. Jenesco had begun to smoke. She had lit a cigarette. Even apart from this suggestive detail, she had the suggestion of a pitch-fire about her in the lazy, veiled attention she devoted to Partridge as this model servant made to clear away the breakfast things.

"So she asked you again, did she, who I was?"

"Yes."

"Yes, ma'am," she corrected him.

"Yes, madam," Partridge accepted with dignity, thus in turn correcting her.

Mme. Jenesco, full-fed and slumbrous, was willing to take a little time for thought and to amuse herself during the interval by playing with her victim. She continued to be a very feline person in certain of her moods.

"Just because you're my father," she remarked with gentle irony, "is no reason why you should not show me proper respect."

Partridge was silent.

So was Mme. Jenesco for a while. Her cigarette smoke coiled in the sunlight. She lazily extinguished her cigarette in a finger-bowl.

"Mélissine tried her first cigarette yesterday," she said. "She is a bright little thing."

Partridge turned from the side-table where he had

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placed the breakfast-tray. He looked at her with a resurgence of the strength that was concealed in this feeble-looking package that was his physical self. And Mme. Jenesco, aware of the nature of his look, pretended to ignore it.

"I've promised to take her to a musical show as soon as she can get some decent street clothes. Those ready-mades you and she bought are a sketch."

Partridge was still silent. Mme. Jenesco, taking her time about it, resumed her monologue.

"She tells me that you've always handled the money. I have decided to change all that. Now don't fly off the handle." She finally consented to look at him. "I'm not going to blame you for doing what you did. But there's got to be an accounting—between you and me. We can keep it in the family"—another gentle allusion to Partridge's claim to parenthood.

"I have given the matter considerable thought," said Partridge, speaking at last but still weakly, and only at the cost of an effort. "I have thought of it in all its phases."

Mme. Jenesco heard him with the tolerant air of one who might have said: "Suppose you let me do your thinking for you!"

"I am convinced," said Partridge, with a degree of detachment, "that this will prove to be a blessing to all of us in the long run. Sometimes it is hard to perceive. It is hard to adjust our idea of what should be, with the facts as they are. But, of course, any other theory than that all is for the best would be wrong. That way

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madness lies. We must have faith. We must have charity."

"I never wanted to treat you rough," Mme. Jenesco confessed with a certain indulgence. "I like you. I always have liked you. God knows you're different enough from most old men you meet in New York. Now that you're beginning to wake up, we'll get along all right together."

Partridge seemed to know that this was merely the storm-wind disguised as a breeze.

"I am appealing to your better nature," he said simply and gently. "I want you to go away from here."

"You want—what?"

"I want you to go away from here," said Partridge, a little less gently.

Mme. Jenesco measured him for a space.

"We settled all that."

Partridge wasn't going to be turned aside. He consulted his spiritual records of the night before as a lawyer might have consulted his law books.

"I am sure," he said—although clearly he was not sure—"that you will not care to remain here when you see that your staying here may harm Miss Tyrone. Let me continue"—this to quiet a stir of impatience on the part of the Jenesco woman. "How will it be when Mr. Buckhannon—who is a most refined young man, and one of excellent family—returns to find that his fiancée smokes cigarettes, and goes to musical shows——"

He was interrupted by Mme. Jenesco's amused laugh.

"I beg of you," Partridge flared urgently, "to consult

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your own conscience. God watches you, hears you——”

“You’re a nice one to preach,” said Mme. Jenesco.

“God pity me, I am!” Partridge confessed. “But I stand ready to sacrifice myself for Miss Tyrone’s sake. I have been long in the family. It has been the only family I have.”

“Say!” said Mme. Jenesco. “I’ve heard enough of this. You make me sick. I give you an inch and you take an ell. That’s the sort you are. Just because I consented to humo. you when you insulted my mother’s memory by claiming to be my father, you think that I’m a ninny. Why don’t you treat me like a Tyrone, since you’re so devoted to the Tyrones. I’m a Tyrone. And I’m ready to go to court any time you are, and prove it. You’re not so crazy as all that. I give you credit for the brains you have. You must have had some brains to get your hands on the Tyrone fortune. But you’ve had it long enough. It’s mine. My mother was the only real wife Nathan Tyrone ever had, if it comes to that. Who’s this Mélissine? She’s nothing but a ——”

“Hush! before God!” shuddered Partridge.

“What’s the big idea?” cried Mme. Jenesco. “Why should I hush? Why should one girl get all the protection and another girl get none? It wasn’t my fault—was it—that my mother didn’t want to stay in this rotten old house. I don’t blame her. It wasn’t her that gave the house the bad name it’s got. She had some refinement. She had some sense of decency. She knew what sort of a dump this was. She knew what

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sort of a reputation you'd given it—you and your Nathan Tyrone. I say it, even if he was my father."

This latter statement of hers, and the spectacle of Partridge's present helplessness, stirred her courage to a fresh display.

"I know now why you claimed to be my father. I know. I know who your real sweetheart was. I've seen the way you looked at the portrait of that little French actress in the other room. I noticed it the very first time I came here. But I didn't say anything about it then. I was trying to be decent. But you! You don't know what decency is. Who was she—this French doll that you claim Tyrone married in Paris? I'll tell you. She was a little *demi-mondaine*! That's what she was. Ah, I knew that'd get you! Sure! It's all right to insult *my* mother. But insult *her*! That's a different story!"

"I beg of you," said Partridge. "I appeal to your better nature!"

But Mme. Jenesco clung to her inspiration.

"And shall I tell you why? I'll tell you why. It was because my mother was above letting a servant make love to her——"

"Oh! Oh!" cried Partridge softly, striking the air with his fists.

"And because this French woman," said Mme. Jenesco, with a sudden, sultry impressiveness, "was not!"

"Woman! Woman!" gasped Partridge. "This is blasphemy!"

And there was such a look about him that even Mme.

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Jenesco had a moment of recoil. Partridge had cast his eyes about him. A little more and he might have seized one of the heavy silver candlesticks that stood near, and have used it as a club.

But, just then, Partridge saw something that Mme. Jenesco hadn't seen and which made his terror greater than his rage. Where he stood he could see through the length of the house. He had caught a glimpse of Méliissine coming slowly down the stairs. He clapped a hand to his heart. He tried to speak. His face went haggard. His knees sagged.

Apparently he had intended merely to approach Mme. Jenesco somewhat to warn her to be more careful, to keep her voice down. But his step was shambling. A carpet interfered with the movement of his feet.

He stumbled. He went to his knees.

CHAPTER XLIII

AFTER THIS THE JUDGMENT

SEE," said Partridge. "I humble myself before you." His voice was a little more than a croaking whisper.

"It isn't on my own account. It is on your account as much as any one's. God on His throne knows that I wish nothing but good to you and every one. Forgive me the wrath I have shown. I have been over-zealous. But say nothing more. Say nothing more. Say nothing more."

Nothing that Partridge could have said would have been more eloquent than that triple appeal of his to say nothing more.

"I knew it!" said Mme. Jenesco. She had drawn back a little at Partridge's sudden collapse. She looked down at him. But she was now moved most of all by what seemed to be proof of her amazing charge. "I knew that there was something crooked somewhere and that my own mother wasn't mixed up in it in any way. So it was this French woman, was it?"

"No! No! What you say is blasphemy!"

"It wasn't so long as you were saying it about my mother. Was it?"

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"I beseech you——"

"I don't blame you for getting excited. It would sound fine coming out before a judge and jury how you and Tyrone had robbed an American lady of her rights all on account of some rotten little chorus-girl from Paris."

Partridge's beseechment was now principally of his eyes. He had an ear for the things that Mme. Jenesco was saying, but one would have said that his whole body had become an ear for the sound of something else. What was that shadow he had seen—or thought he had seen—on the stairs? He looked at the doorway. He looked at Mme. Jenesco. Himself, and the position he was in—on his knees before this pagan goddess, so to speak—he seemed to have forgotten utterly.

"You wouldn't ruin her young life," said Partridge.

"Her! Her! Always her!"

"She loves you!"

Mme. Jenesco began to laugh. From sheer nervousness and a touch of hysteria she picked up a glass and suddenly hurled it against a corner of the window-frame.

"I don't know whether to fire you or to keep you here," she said, "fire Mélissine or keep *her* here! What are you croaking about? Haven't I been fond of the little thing myself?"

She was smitten by a sort of silence that had fallen upon the room—the sort of silence that one feels when suddenly discovering that something unguessed, something unforeseen, has come to pass. Or perhaps it was the fact that Partridge was again staring toward the

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doorway that led into the hall. She turned lazily to see what it was that Partridge was looking at.

And there stood Méliissine.

This, and absolute silence—Méliissine standing there at the shadowy doorway, dressed in white, a white solemnity about her, a calm that had a touch of the awe-inspiring about it, a touch of the terror-inspiring, even; and then Mme. Jenesco, robed in her black and embroidered kimono, coiling herself into some sort of readiness for action, whether a spring or a caress none could have said; and then Partridge, still on his knees, fumbling, broken, yet with a look in his face that here was judgment.

Mme. Jenesco was the first to speak.

"What a turn you gave me!" she cried. She tittered. She turned to Partridge. "Be careful not to cut your fingers." She turned again to Méliissine. "I dropped a glass. Why, what's come over you, child? Come here and kiss me, silly."

Partridge, though, was beyond such acting. So was Méliissine. Méliissine watched Partridge getting slowly to his feet. Partridge retired a little—like an old man dazed from a fall; his knees were bent; his white hair was slightly disordered. And then Méliissine was looking at Mme. Jenesco again. Several times Méliissine had trembled on the brink of speech, then seemed to have sought words that would be more sufficient for what she wanted to say.

Mme. Jenesco, drawing her kimono about her, was for acting, still. She kicked a piece of the broken

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tumbler under the table with her slippered foot. She arose. She seemed to entertain the purpose of taking Méliissine into her arms.

But Méliissine retired a step.

On Méliissine's face there had appeared what for want of a better name will have to be called a smile, but which was really no smile at all. A real smile is a smile of the eyes. In Méliissine's blue eyes there was no smile at all. There was no smile in her gentle voice—just that profundity of interest.

"Was that my mother you were talking about?" she inquired.

"Listen to the child!"

"Do you really mean that father and mother were not—what they call—legally married?"

"Why, where in the world did you get that?" spluttered the Woman in Black.

Now that a question had been asked by Mme. Jenesco herself Méliissine was perfectly willing to answer. Maybe, like that, Mme. Jenesco also would begin to answer questions.

"I got it," answered Méliissine, with just enough accent on the "got" to make Mme. Jenesco wince, "from what you were just saying to Mr. Partridge."

Here was Mme. Jenesco's chance to counter. Still she tried to rescue the situation by remaining playful.

"Little eavesdroppers often overhear things that they don't understand." An arch observation.

"I wasn't eavesdropping," said Méliissine quite steadily and with no semblance of heat. "Your voice was so

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loud that it could have been heard through the house."

"I like that," remarked Mme. Jenesco, meaning that she didn't.

For the first time since she began to speak, Mélissine directed her attention to Partridge.

"It appears," she said—and she spoke with that formalism of another century which her father had always loved and encouraged—"it appears, from what Mme. Jenesco just said, that there is a blot on the family escutcheon."

"There is none," quoth Partridge.

"Quoth" expresses Partridge's tone of voice, although it was little more than a whisper.

Mélissine's attention returned to Mme. Jenesco.

"There is absolutely no occasion for half truths or evasions," Mélissine proclaimed. "I have read a good deal on the subject from a purely legal standpoint in one of Judge Bancroft's works. I share his opinion that stultification of the child through a lack of legal formality in the relations of the parents is justified—in the eyes of man—if not in the eyes of God."

"Dearie!" exclaimed Mme. Jenesco, "I don't know what you're talking about." And again that movement indicated a readiness to receive Mélissine into her arms.

"Was it true," demanded Mélissine with a slight rise in her temperature, "that my father had a former wife?"

Partridge shouted. He shouted, "No!" But his open mouth gave out no sound. It was something like that so far as Mme. Jenesco was concerned. A gasp from

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her. Though this might have been intended for an affirmative.

"And that *you* were—his daughter—and hers?"

Mélistine had spoken very slowly—so slowly that it had given both Partridge and Mme. Jenesco the chance to summon the power of speech they saw they were going to need.

"No! No!" clamored Partridge, in a voice that was big, but which was husky and not very loud. "It's all a damnable lie. It is not true!"

Mme. Jenesco whirled on him with the sure instinct that it would be easier far to fight this old man whom she had already vanquished than it would be to fight Mélistine. She understood Partridge. But—for the second or third time since coming to this house—she was aware that there was something about Mélistine that she did not understand. It was something that frightened her a little. The girl, especially now, wasn't a girl so much as she was a shaft of light—a daylight ghost, so to speak.

"If I was you," said Belle to Partridge, "I wouldn't talk about lies and liars. I'd keep my mouth shut."

But Mélistine wouldn't be ignored. She gave an odd little cry so sharp that it commanded silence. But when she did speak her voice was not so very loud—just cold and final.

"Stop it!" she said. "I won't let anyone speak to him like that. He's——"

And then Belle broke in on her.

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"That's it; stand up for him," she bawled. "You ought to. That's what I'm tellin' you. Nathan Tyrone wasn't your father. You've been fooled long enough. That's him!—that's your father standin' over there!"

CHAPTER XLIV

MR. PARTRIDGE, THIEF!

MÉLISSINE may have given a slight gasp, as of pain, but she remained motionless, flaming white, listening.

"It's a lie!"

This from Partridge, in a breathless, husky whisper. He was no longer the suppliant. He was anything but that. His slightly ruffled hair and disordered clothing gave him an added touch. He was fighting-mad.

Mme. Jenesco may have suspected that her sheep had become wolves. She was controlling her temper by this time.

"How do you dare to deny it?" she began with scorn.

But Partridge was back at her in an instant:

"Hold your tongue and let me finish! I say that when you suggest such a thing you suggest an outrageous and sacrilegious lie. I say that you have no right in this house whatsoever except as the guest of my mistress—of her you seek to traduce."

"So you're going to force the issue!" said Mme. Jenesco.

"I have stated the issue."

"Oh, you have!"

Mr. Partridge, Thief!

"The only issue is Miss Tyrone's good name and happiness."

Somehow or other Partridge was not so much the butler as he was the high priest. Even about him there was a measure of that quality that Mme. Jenesco had discovered in Mélissine. For a moment she may have been debating a flood of tears. She felt as if she might have wept—wept real tears. No, this would have been mere weakness. And she recalled that terror that had come over Partridge the very first day of her advent in this house.

"One would say so," said Mme. Jenesco, with a tone that she meant to be finely ironic. "You have shown yourself to be a very good friend of Mélissine's; haven't you?" Partridge knew what was coming. "Oh, very well," Mme. Jenesco essayed again. "I wanted to be decent. I wanted to shield Mélissine, even if she wasn't anything but—but—" She didn't complete the phrase.

Partridge dominated her with his new-found authority. He had drawn himself up. He spoke direct to Mélissine. And his eyes were on Mélissine. But there was that about him to indicate that it was not Mélissine at all to whom he spoke or at whom he looked. It was just as if Partridge were addressing his own conscience standing there in front of him, that or a ghost.

"This woman," said Partridge, "began with the claim that Mr. Tyrone was her father—God save the mark! She pretended that this would be sufficient collateral evidence, if brought before the courts (Partridge was quoting as best he could from Judge Bancroft) to sub-

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stantiate her claim—the fact that certain moneys had been paid through a period of years, first to her mother and then to herself. This has become the basis of a blackmail——”

“Don’t you dare to call me a blackmailer,” Mme. Jenesco interjected. A mere scramble on her part to get to the top of the heap.

But Partridge remained dominant.

“I have already informed her,” he continued, “that I accept full responsibility.” Partridge was winging like an eagle now—very high up, sure of himself, poised, making no effort. “I have told her that it was I who was her father, that it was I who made the payments of money.”

“Without Mr. Tyrone knowing anything about it?”—this from Mme. Jenesco in a seducing softness.

“Without Mr. Tyrone knowing anything about it,” he averred.

Mme. Jenesco turned to Mélissine. “That makes him out to be a thief, at any rate,” she said. “The money wasn’t his. He took it. He stole it.”

“No, no!” said Mélissine.

“But I say yes! Stole it! Ask him if he didn’t! He ought to go to prison!”

“No! No!” protested Mélissine again. She cast a desperate look at Partridge. She confronted Mme. Jenesco with a flaming face. “And, after all, what if he did take any money? What’s that? It wasn’t for himself. It must have been because he loved you so. It was because he loved your mother so. Why, if I thought

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that—that Mr. Buckhannon needed money—and I knew where some was—that no one else really needed——”

She came to a faltering stop, on the verge of tears. It was Mme. Jenesco's attitude that stopped her.

“There are things about this that you don't understand at all,” Mme. Jenesco said tensely. “Maybe, after you know all the facts, you won't be so ready to defend—this thief!”

“Mr. Tyrone was not a party to the payments,” said Partridge. “Mr. Tyrone never concerned himself with money matters. It was I who was entrusted with the handling of his funds.”

All right. Mme. Jenesco had him either way.

“So you did steal the money you gave us!”

“Yes,” said Partridge; “I did!”

Saying which, Partridge must have discovered that he had said everything that he had to say just then—to his conscience, at least. He wavered for a moment or so longer—just long enough to become quite sure of this. Then he seemed to recognize that he was no longer the soaring eagle that he had been. He was just the old man who had been a servant in this house so long—a man old, decrepit, beginning to dodder.

Abruptly, in order to save his dignity—and he saved it—he turned and picked up the forgotten breakfast-tray and carried it out of the room.

Mélinisse had barely stirred. Possibly she hadn't stirred at all. She had an appearance of arrested movement, of arrested something finer than movement—flush

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on her face, eyes liquid with blue fire, lips parted, and her breast had ceased to rise and fall. Then she sighed.

But that seemed to be a long time after Partridge had made his exit.

The interval had been long enough for Mme. Jenesco to collapse—"collapse" expresses it—into the chair she had vacated about a hundred years ago. It seemed like a hundred years ago. Mme. Jenesco was flabbergasted. She didn't know what to do. She wanted to laugh. She wanted to cry. It was all too ridiculous. And yet it wasn't funny at all. The old fool had put himself into her power. He had confessed to a crime that could send him up the river for the rest of his natural. (The phrasing is Mme. Jenesco's.) And yet she didn't feel that she had him in her power at all.

She looked up and found that Mélissine was looking at her, and the expression in Mélissine's face made Mme. Jenesco feel more uncomfortable still.

CHAPTER XLV

SUSPENDED JUDGMENT

WHAT was that thing you were saying about Partridge and my mother?" MéliSSine asked softly.

"It was nothing."

"But what I heard was more than nothing."

"I must have lost my temper—we all say things that we don't mean when we're excited."

"This was so much like something that you hinted the other day—that I was too stupid or ignorant then to understand. It was when you spoke of passion. Don't you remember?"

"Darling," said Belle. "Come to me! Come to my arms!"

Instead of accepting the invitation, MéliSSine walked over to the window and looked out. She did not smile. Yet she showed no anger. Except for a certain pallor there was no evidence of any great emotion about her at all.

"I am so unhappy," said Belle, and she began to weep.

MéliSSine remained at the window. She didn't turn. But finally she spoke:

"Maybe you'd feel better if you let me go to Partridge

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and tell him that you want to beg his pardon—tell him that you didn't mean all you said—and that you know he isn't a thief."

"No thank you," said Belle. "I'm going to my room." And she got up, pressing her handkerchief to her mouth.

But Mélissine turned now, and they faced each other.

"Are you going to remain with us, or are you going away?" Mélissine asked with perfect politeness.

This gave Belle pause. She had had enough of fighting for the moment. She loved luxury more than strife. But she couldn't let the great adventure die like this.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Mélissine's answer was indirect. Mélissine was showing a sharper sign of grief. But she was strong—with a strength that Belle found disconcerting.

"The house has a bad name," said Mélissine, with a dejected little laugh; "and so have I, and father, and mother, and Partridge. Surely you can't want to remain in such a place, with people like Partridge and me."

"What would *you* like to see me do?" Belle asked.

Mélissine took time to think. She walked about the room a bit, looking at this thing and that, while Mme. Jenesco watched her, furtively, using the time to do some thinking of her own. When Mélissine turned their eyes met. They were not so far apart. There was some sort of a silent conflict between them before Mélissine spoke.

"I want you to stay."

"Sure?"

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"Yes; I'm sure."

"After all that's been said?"

"Because of what's been said," Méliissine stated, struggling to express her thought. "You're wrong. You're all wrong. It's because I know that you're all wrong—about me, and father, and mother, and Partridge, just as the people of this street are wrong about this house—that I want you to stay here and find out the truth."

"Maybe this truth, when it does come out, will make you wish it hadn't," said Belle. There was no menace in her words; rather it was meant as a friendly warning. "You know as well as I do that Partridge has been holding out something. Whether it's this money he stole——"

"He never stole!"

"Are you so sure?"

"I'd go into court and swear it," said Méliissine. "If it were necessary I'd swear that the money was all his."

"But what if it was mine?"

"I believe you'd do the same," Méliissine answered slowly. "You would if you'd stay here long enough. Stay here long enough and you'll love him as much as I do—almost. Stay here long enough and you'll understand how I trust him even if there is something that he can't tell. You ought to wish he *was* your father!"

All this, as if Méliissine were under a spell, the spell of a recent vision. And then she had emerged from the spell somewhat. There was a lessening of the tension. She made a confession of her own. The confession was a plea for sympathy.

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"You know," she said softly, "that it does make a difference when your father is dead. I've tried to pretend that it didn't. But it does. It wasn't like it was with mother. I couldn't remember her. At least, my eyes, and my hands, and my arms couldn't remember her. But it's different now. They have been empty since father went away."

And suddenly, yet without obvious transition, this recent figure of light had become a tearful girl, very lonely, very much in need of human consolation.

Ascribe Mme. Jenesco's action to any motive that you will. Perhaps that lady was looking for something to cling to quite as much as Mélissine was. Or possibly Mme. Jenesco wasn't willing to submit herself even to Mélissine's tearful scrutiny just then. There were tears in Mélissine's eyes. And Mélissine's arms were out as if to substantiate what she had to say about their emptiness.

In any case, there was Mme. Jenesco with Mélissine huddled against her knees, and Mme. Jenesco's own arms about Mélissine. There had been nothing strained about this reception Mme. Jenesco had given the girl, either. One would have said that Mme. Jenesco's arms, just then, were satisfying some craving of her own—some hunger also born of emptiness.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH

THEY remained there for a rather long time, neither of them mentioning again that singular confession that Partridge had made. Neither of them had said anything for a while except as tears and silence may be said to be a sort of language.

As for Mélissine, it was clear that she was thinking of nothing except of the father that she had lost—and also of the father this other woman had rejected. The Lord only knows what Mme. Jenesco may have been thinking about—thinking of those very matters, perhaps, she would think about when she stood in the presence of the Lord in an old-fashioned Judgment Day.

It was Mélissine who first broke the silence. Mélissine was an intuitional type. Possibly she had caught some strand of the older woman's thought, felt that in some odd way Mme. Jenesco was really the one who stood in the greater need of sympathy.

"I've thought a lot about the things that people do that they should not do," said Mélissine.

"Have you"—from Mme. Jenesco, with a species of wonder.

"About sin!"

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"You don't know anything about sin."

Mélistine nodded her head. But she wiped her eyes before she looked up. Mme. Jenesco met her gaze, trying to read the riddle of the girl's train of thought.

"I know that it must be the most important thing in the world," Mélistine announced with calm judgment.

"For the love of—" Mme. Jenesco checked herself. She took a fresh turn. Maybe there was something about this girl that she wouldn't have believed. Her continuation was more in the nature of a leading question: "Why, you've never been out of the house after dark in your life."

"I never have—not when it was very dark."

"Then what are you talking about?"

"The whole Bible was written about sin—and for the sake of sinners," Mélistine began.

"Oh!" and Mme. Jenesco breathed more easily.

"And all the law books," Mélistine continued. "No preacher ever talks about anything else—at least, not in any of the books of sermons I've ever run across. Suppose you yourself were a sinner."

"Suppose I was," breathed Mme. Jenesco, cautiously.

"Don't you suppose that the world would at once feel a greater interest in you and a greater love for you than if you were just an ordinary, nice woman?"

"What gives you that idea?" Mme. Jenesco countered.

"Everything," said Mélistine. "That's just what I've been talking about. The whole world—the whole civilized world—that part of the world that has ever written

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books, at least, has had the sinner's interest at heart—you know: 'The joy over one sinner,' and all that sort of thing."

Mélistine was patient, but it is to be feared that Mélistine was finding Mme. Jenesco a bit obtuse. She waited when she saw that Mme. Jenesco was trying to see a light.

"That's a new one on me," said Mme. Jenesco.

"Maybe that's because you were never a sinner yourself," said Mélistine.

Mme. Jenesco suppressed an expression that had been on the tip of her tongue. "Oh, I see what you're driving at," she said. "You mean—the reformers! Sure, dearie! I know what you mean. You won't get mad if I tell you something!"

"Of course not."

"I never cared much for these reformers. As a rule, you'll find that they're just as rotten as the rest of them."

Mélistine studied Mme. Jenesco for a time, not sure that she had seized Mme. Jenesco's meaning. But she saw that she had. She said so.

"You mean the Philistines—the holier-than-thou kind."

Mme. Jenesco took a chance and said, "Yes."

"I don't blame you."

"Then we're of one mind," said Mme. Jenesco with almost her first smile. This dipping into the waters of transgression hadn't pleased her any too much.

"Are we of one mind?" queried Mélistine.

"Of course we are."

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"Then why were you so hard on poor Partridge? I call him Grandy. He used to play horse for me when I was little! He taught me how to read and spell! If I was thirsty or frightened in the night, he was there. His voice was so soft and his face was so gentle! When I used to say 'Now-I-lay-me' I used to think of God Himself as a sort of great white Grandy there leaning over me, and I'd feel happy and willing to go to sleep."

"I didn't want to be hard on the old man," Mme. Jenesco whispered.

Mélistine reached up and touched her cheek with soft fingers.

"And I know," said Mélistine, "that you really didn't mean what you said about your mother and my mother."

Mme. Jenesco's answer was premeditated.

"No," she said, after brief but serious thought; "I swear to God that I didn't mean it, and that I shall never say such a thing again."

"I love you," said Mélistine. She gave a tart flavor to the otherwise rather tame assertion by adding: "So does Grandy."

"How do you know?"

"Because I had my doubts, for a while, and I made him come right out and say that he did. And now I think that both of us must love him more than ever—if that is dearly possible." (Mélistine's rendition of the French *Dieu possible*.)

This may have been a little too much for Mme. Jenesco right away. She was from a part of the world where such things were not done.

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She changed the conversation to what she knew would be pleasanter lines. "And when," she asked, "is that young Mr. Buckhannon coming back?"

"Next week."

"Listen," said Belle. "If I was you, sweetheart, I wouldn't tell him anything about all this. You know; it'd only worry him. And, as a rule, the less you tell men the better you are off anyway."

CHAPTER XLVII

DARK O' THE NIGHT

WHEN Eugene Buckhannon came back to Cinnamon Street it was with an almost painful sense of loss. At the same time he couldn't tell whether he should be grateful for this loss or whether he should go and drown himself because of it.

Young men are often subject to these contrary reactions, while life is still fluid, and while they are still confined to this fluid condition—like the larva of certain insects, condemned at first to a purely aquatic existence, but destined later to the development of wings and a life in the immeasurable air.

Buckhannon's sense of loss came down to this:

He had been through a wonderful experience. It had been a species of dream. He had thought it was real. But it couldn't have been real. Nothing real could have been so wonderful. Now he was waked up. He had his feet on the earth. He was altogether sane. It was the old glamour that he was to find missing—the old dream quality—the poetic touch of madness. He had lost all this in Tennessee.

And what was that thing Lafcadio Hearn had said about there being a touch of ghostliness about all great

Dark o' the Night

art? Didn't the same apply equally well to all great living? Life would be brutal, life would be swinish, without its tinge of unearthliness, its occasional mist of hallucination.

Yet now he was going to find that Mélissine was just an ordinary girl; lovely, doubtless, but no lovelier than many of the many, many lovely creatures of his native State.

To bring him back to the larva or wriggler figure of speech, said wriggler had wriggled to the surface of its fluid habitat and glimpsed a wider world. Then, as wrigglers will, when not obedient to any higher impulse, he had settled down again.

But straightway he was back in Cinnamon Street again, once more the spell was upon him.

It had so happened that his train had brought him into New York late. It was far too late to call. It was going on eleven o'clock. Naturally, the best thing he could do was to go straight to his hotel and get his clothes unpacked and take a good bath and then go to bed and get a good night's sleep so as to be fresh in the morning. That was the sensible thing. He had it all reasoned out.

But if there is one thing in the world that youth will not do that thing is to be obedient to the dictates of the sensible.

Buckhannon did go to his usual hotel—a small one, far down-town in the neighborhood of Washington Square—not so very far from Cinnamon Street. And he took his bath. But long before the water was drawn

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he knew that it wasn't going to be bed right afterward. Already Cinnamon Street was calling to him with a thousand siren voices.

Out into the street he went, no longer feeling tired, wondering how he could have stayed away so long—two weeks—and he had almost decided to make it three on the petition of his mother!

Almost midnight when he rounded Cape Tony Zamboni and made the dark roadstead of the familiar harbor. The very atmosphere of the street, to drop the figure, was different from any street through which he had passed. To one side of No. 6 was an abandoned smithy over which there hung an ailanthus tree—or so-called tree-of-heaven—and this was in full flower, thus shedding about it a faint, sweet perfume something like the perfume of the petunias in his mother's garden. But those were locusts in the graveyard and these also were in bloom—a redolence of young summer—a fragrance like that of wild grape and wild honeysuckle.

When afflicted by spring-fever in his early boyhood, and the vague seasonal yearnings of the primitive man, and he had wandered along lonely streams, back in old Carroll County, it had been a fragrance like this that had inspired his broodings and found lodgment in the back of his brain. It all returned to him now. He was the primitive man. This was the lonely wilderness. He was seeking his mate. This perfume was the sign of her presence.

Thus the very air of Cinnamon Street had brought back, in a measure, what he thought he had lost.

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He had taken the other side of the street. He came to a pause just opposite to No. 6. He looked at it as a recently disembodied spirit may be supposed to take its first look at some familiar marble mansion in the sky. The same touch of awe! The same stir of fearful expectancy! The same assurance of joy to come! And possibly the same sort of recognition as of something seen and deeply loved before—if there be anything in the theory of reincarnations!

To all ordinary eyes No. 6 would have appeared as merely a once noble dwelling, still with a touch of the grand about it, also with that touch of tragic mystery possessed by all old houses that stand apart in the darkness and silence of a deserted street. But to Buckhan-
non the house was filled as with an inner light. This light was radiated from Mélissine. With the eyes of his soul he could see her lying there asleep in an upper chamber undisturbed and as if native to the radiance about her, as if she had been a creature of the sun.

Was it possible that he had aspired to make a creature like this his bride! Would God and the angels ever forgive him for such an effrontery! Would he ever be clean enough and otherwise worthy enough!

These weren't questions. These were exclamations. Each exclamation was in the nature of a prayer.

For the matter of that, there was the same sort of feeling about him as he might have experienced had he been back in Notre Dame. And his senses abetted him in this. The mingled perfume of the locusts and the heaven-tree became the pale blue smoke of the swinging

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censers. Once more the muffled, muted sounds of the great city fell into the majestic cadences and harmonies of a mighty organ. This was a *Miserere* that was being played—over a city of the dead—five million sleepers who to-morrow would rise in the glory of the Lord.

Buckhannon's thought, but a thought developed by his thought of Mélissine. No wonder that the philosophers say that all great poems, temples, songs, and battles, even, have their origin in some man's thought of some one woman!

But various philosophers have also pointed out that just as a man attains his highest flight something is almost bound to happen to him—"pride goeth before a fall," and so on.

While Buckhannon still stood there seeing things otherwise invisible—seeing them with the eyes of his soul—the eyes of his body recovered their vision, recovered their ascendancy.

At first he could not persuade himself that his eyes were not deceiving him. This was a hallucination sure enough. This was something spun from the incantations of those three he-witches: the druggist, the coachman, and the policeman.

But what he saw or thought that he saw was this:

The unlighted door of No. 6 had opened. From the inner darkness a figure had emerged. The figure was that of a woman. The woman was dressed in black.

CHAPTER XLVIII

"KILLEEVY, O KILLEEVY!"

BUT it wasn't very long before he had identified this sinister shape. This was the Jenesco woman—Belle!—and there in the dark there was a tingling in his body that his soul spurned. The skin of his neck was as if gifted with a memory of her torrid breath, and his sense of smell with a souvenir of musk. This was night, and the night was warm, with a darkness and a solitude about it like that of mating-places when the world was young.

What was she doing? Where was she going? What errand had brought her from the house like this?

There was no mistaking her. There was a movement about her, a grace and a sinuosity, that was as unmistakable as a glimpse of her face would have been. Her face came back to his memory also—the red lips and the dark-burning eyes, the pearl-white skin all of one tone that made her coppery hair so warmly rich.

And she had kissed him. She had put her arms about him. She had told him that she loved him. She was a keeper of secrets that would be his for the asking. He could go over there now, if he wanted to, and call her by her first name. He could embrace her if he wanted

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to and she would tell him everything he wanted to know. And maybe, at the same time, he would be doing a good deed—be saving her from something—saving her from some one she was now going to meet.

His conscience spoke to him: "You're a hog. You're filled with lust. You're not thinking of saving her from anything. You merely hanker for the flesh."

He answered: "I know I am."

But the inner voice had given him pause. It had made him think of Mélissine. Wasn't she dwelling in mystery too? Wasn't she innocent?—unaware of what was going on?—accepting all with a perfect faith? Yea, Lord! There was a white majesty about Mélissine just now that made him ashamed of himself, gave him an ascendancy over his lower self.

But he still lingered there. He saw Mme. Jenesco turn to the left along Cinnamon Street, in the direction of the abandoned chapel. He saw her swallowed up in the shadows that lay so thick along the chapel fence. Once more she appeared—a fleeting shadow, disquieting, enigmatic, under the pale shine of a gas-lamp—and then she was gone.

It all made him feel a trifle sick, a bit desperate. He made no effort to follow her, though. For one night he had seen enough. He returned to his hotel and there fell into troubled dreams.

As a matter of fact, Mme. Jenesco had gone to keep a rendezvous. She was cautious about it. Once well within the shadows of the locust trees she paused and

"Killeevy, O Killeevy!"

looked. She was half persuaded to turn back. She went forward again. She had seen a darker shadow huddled on the stone coping at the base of the fence a little farther along. This darker shadow resolved itself into the familiar semblance of old Goodenough, the coachman.

"So you've come," said Goodenough softly.

He had pulled himself to his feet, partly by aid of the iron picket to which he clung. He stood there wavering like something the substance of which was a mere coagulation of shadow.

"What did you want?" queried Mme. Jenesco with a mingling of resentment and interest.

"I wanted to feast these eyes upon you," spake the poet.

"You've been doing that ever since I came to this street," Mme. Jenesco replied. "That first day, there in the house, when you came with your wreath, you stared at me as if I was a ghost. Ever since then you've kept it up—every time you've seen Miss Tyrone and me out for a walk, every time we hired you for a drive."

"You've got a warm heart," said Goodenough, staring at her.

"If I didn't, I wouldn't be here. Asking me to meet you like this! And me agreeing to it! Most women would have called a cop!"

"It was my only chance," Goodenough replied softly. "The cop on this beat is an old owl named Hickcock. This is the only time of night—while he is eating his

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supper around at the Dutchman's—that he isn't spying about. And in the daytime it's the druggist. And I did want to see you—to speak to you. Twice now I've dreamed of the Angel of Death—up in the haymow where I sleep—and the third time—you know!"

A weird smile appeared on old Goodenough's mask of a face. Here where they stood the shadows were such that Goodenough's face was transformed to a degree—transfigured even; he was the semblance of a man with deep-set eyes under a broad forehead, a straight nose, a mouth expressive of controlled but passionate feeling. He had become the figure of Goodenough as Goodenough might have looked had he developed into a poet sure enough, or as Goodenough might have looked, say, thirty years ago.

His allusion to the Dark Angel was sufficient to hold Mme. Jenesco where she was, further to arouse her curiosity—and her sympathy also, perhaps.

"You said that you had something to tell me," she said.

"I did." But Goodenough was hesitant.

"What was it?"

"I have already told you a part of it," Goodenough replied. "I asked the favor of your presence here as one might who is condemned to die. There was a woman who came to this house upward of thirty years ago. The young Tyrone brought her. She was beautiful. No woman was more correctly named. Her name was Belle."

"Belle!" whispered Mme. Jenesco.

"Killeevy, O Killeevy!"

"Tell me," pleaded Goodenough. His own voice was but little more than a murmur. "Did you ever know any one named that?"

"That was my mother's name," Mme. Jenesco answered—with bated breath, so to speak.

"She was very beautiful," said Goodenough. "She was very beautiful, but she was not for Nathan Tyrone—this woman—this other woman named Belle. It was because you looked like her—oh, it was something in your eyes, and it was something in the sound of your voice and it was in the way your head was balanced on your shoulders when you walked—that made me want to see you here—made me crave this as the one last thing the earth could give me—except the resting place for this broken and misused old body of mine."

Again Mme. Jenesco spoke in her bated whisper:

"What was this woman to you?"

"Everything!"

"You?"

"My gray hair was black and curly then," replied Goodenough softly. "My shoulders were the shoulders of old John L. Sullivan—and him in his prime. I was a wine-drinker then, and ah—the old familiar juice made a Greek god of me—a god of poetry and love! There were fast horses then—poems in horseflesh—the one-footed horses of the Greek urns—Centaur—s—and I drove them for the elder Pliny, wherever and whenever I would—up through the bosky glens of Central Park—a stop at the old tavern on the top of McGowan's Pass—and on to the rocks and romance of the sparkling

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Harlem. The Harlem was a river then, and the banks of it were like the Elysian Fields for such as sought solitude and the delights of Hymen."

"All that's changed," breathed Mme. Jenesco irrelevantly.

"All that is changed," Goodenough echoed solemnly. "She was my bride for a week. Often I come now at night to look into this old acre of green. It was here that I saw her last. It was here that she kissed me good-by—'Killeevy, O Killeevy!'"

"What does 'Killeevy' mean?"

"'Tis a reference to a poem," said Goodenough.

"What poem?" Mme. Jenesco was speaking as one will—to cast a mantle, so to speak, over her naked and shivering thought.

"A poem that has been the story of my life," said Goodenough. "It's called 'The Churchyard Bride.'" And he quoted—as much for his own delectation, one would have said, as for that of the woman who gazed and listened:

"'He pressed her lips as the words were spoken,
Killeevy, O Killeevy!
And his banshee's wail—now far and broken—
Murmured "Death" as he gave the token . . .'"

"And was that all that you wanted to say to me?" asked Mme. Jenesco with a little shiver.

"I wanted to know what became of her," said Goodenough, strangled.

"Who?"

"Killeevy, O Killeevy!"

"Of the Belle who had eyes like yours."

There was a long, long silence—the comparative silence of lower Manhattan late at night. But there were all of those subdued sounds which Buckhannon had heard a while ago. And perhaps for these others, standing here now in Cinnamon Street, the hoots and the moans and the multiple chorus of small human voices translated themselves into organ music.

"My mother died fifteen years ago," said Mme. Jenesco.

"Happy?"

"Unhappy!"

Goodenough shed a tear.

"There is only one more thing that I would ask," he announced in his halting whisper. "Before she died—perchance in the last moments—did she mention any one name in particular?"

"She mentioned some one by the name of Ernest. She wouldn't tell me who he was. Tell me; was it you she meant?"

Goodenough breathed slowly. His eyes were no longer held so steadily on her who stood here in front of him. When he spoke it was as if to himself, but he spoke with a species of satisfaction that had commendation in it—as if he had intended some one else besides Mme. Jenesco to overhear.

"That will remain our secret—hers and mine!"

CHAPTER XLIX

THE SMELL OF LOCUSTS

THE house in Cinnamon Street, old No. 6, had become the whole world for Eugene Buckhannon. All his earthly life was centered there. Did it cease to exist, then he would himself have become a mere errant spirit in space.

So he reflected, feverish, on his sleepless pillow.

His uneasy imagination took a wider flight. For No. 6 revealed itself as the world in a wider sense. It was a symbol of the universe, a symbol of life, and of the Creator of life! This house with a bad name held within it the whole story of creation, from the First Book of Moses to St. John the Divine and his Apocalypse! This house had appeared when the part of New York in which it stood was a garden. Then had come death, and God knew why. And since then death and misery and mystery had taken it for their dwelling-place, along with the descendants of the original Adam and the original Eve—just as these things had made a dwelling-place of the world at large.

Buckhannon turned his pillow over and cooled his temples.

But why, since these things had ever abided in the

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world, did people care to go on with the burden of living? Why the fretful, mortal fascinations of this greater house with a bad name which was the world?

Ah—and an inspiration came to him as he now lay there staring wide-eyed up into the darkness—it was because even in this cursed world there had always been a memory and an expectation. There had always been that golden glint of love—as of something experienced, as of something yet to come!

It was still early in the morning when Buckhannon returned to Cinnamon Street. The sun was shining. The sun and the birds, as well, were in the locust trees, and the smell of these were in the air recalling everything that he had ever felt of romance and aspiration. It was like the breath of Mélissine herself. So his devoted mind was telling him. He ran up the steps of the high stoop. His hand trembled at the knocker.

This was why life was worth living.

And scarcely had the knocker fallen than the door swung open. Buckhannon stepped forward—a light in his eyes, a song in his heart. It was Mme. Jenesco who was there. It was she who had opened the door. It was she who stood in front of him now. And it would have been hard to say which one of them was the more surprised, the more confused.

"I—I beg your pardon," Buckhannon faltered.

"Oh, it's you!" said Mme. Jenesco.

And her own embarrassment was such that it constituted a delicious shiver—something that she had almost for-

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gotten as a relic of her remote past, something that she had never expected to experience again in the presence of any man.

She would have looked for such an experience in the presence of Buckhannon least of all. She had thought quite a little concerning Buckhannon, had talked not a little about him to Mélissine. Mme. Jenesco had never approved of Buckhannon: Instinctively she had felt that this boy—this farmer—would be her enemy. And, anyway, what was he as a possible husband for Mélissine? Mme. Jenesco had visioned something else as a husband for Mélissine—possibly a rich old man—some one who was rich at any rate and familiar to Broadway, familiar to Fifth Avenue, even.

Why not? Didn't every girl have a right to be ambitious? And Mme. Jenesco herself might become a girl again, with a foil like Mélissine.

But here and now, Mme. Jenesco had felt a thrill in the very center of her being, a shiver, a yearning, a panic. All at once she was aware again that this boy was beautiful. This was youth. This was pure young strength. This was a passion of love.

Buckhannon himself must have felt a curious reaction.

This was not Mélissine who stood in front of him. It was Woman.

He hadn't noticed it before, how beautiful this woman was. For the matter of that he had never seen her with this look in her face, not even that time she told him she loved him. Nor had he ever seen her dressed like this. She didn't seem to be wearing much else than some

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sort of a silk dressing-gown—black, lined with coral pink—something that left her very lithe and supple and soft. Her dark red hair fell heavily about her ivory face. This gave an added depth to her eyes.

"How do you do?" Buckhannon stammered.

Mme. Jenesco gave him a mysterious smile. She put out her left hand—her smooth round arm bare to above the elbow. As an act of simple politeness, Buckhannon would have shaken hands with her. Perhaps that was all that she had intended. He thought that it was. But her hand clung to his. Her hand was hot and moist. A sort of electricity came from it—a dynamic force that made Buckhannon's heart beat faster. Her perfume reached him—musty, suggestive of sandalwood, suggestive of deep tropic forests.

"How do *you* do?" she murmured.

"I am well. I hope——"

Her smile checked him. Her smile was equivalent to the slight magnetic drag of her hand.

"Come in and tell me about it," she said.

And she was leading him helpless, but unconscious of his helplessness—conscious only of a certain trouble—his delayed meeting with MéliSSine, his physical unrest in the presence of this woman. He couldn't be brusque. He couldn't be impolite. She gave him no opportunity to speak until they were in the shadowy drawing-room.

"How is Miss Tyrone?" Buckhannon inquired.

"Silly boy!" said Mme. Jenesco, with a warm, but rather sad little laugh. "How impetuous you are! Haven't you time for a single word with any of the

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others who may be fond of you?" She led him, confused, to a sofa. She lessened his confusion by telling him that Mélissine would doubtless be down shortly. She added to it by telling him that she wanted to talk to him about Mélissine.

They were still standing there at the side of the sofa. Mme. Jenesco turned and confronted Buckhannon with her face very close to his. He had thought that she was taller than she was. Her face was as if directly under his own. Her two vibrant hands were on his arms. He was more conscious than ever of her animal heat, her jungle perfume. He was dazzled by her eyes and her mouth.

All this while his whole heart, his soul, and his conscience, were rioting in a perfect frenzy of fidelity for Mélissine.

"You're both so very young," said Mme. Jenesco.

— And she drew him down to a place at her side on the sofa.

CHAPTER L

IN THE MOMENT OF NEED

I DON'T quite understand you." said Buckhannon, lamely.

"Life has so many wonderful opportunities," said Mme. Jenesco, with the sure instinct that she was uttering a thought to which Buckhannon could subscribe. Her voice was warm and soothing. Again she smiled into his face, this time with her eyes half closed.

"That's right," said Buckhannon.

"No boy should rush into marriage," said Mme. Jenesco, "until he knows something of the world. And you're such a boy—so full of ideals—so ready to trust every one!"

"What makes you say that?" demanded Buckhannon, embarrassed.

Mme. Jenesco didn't answer immediately. She kept her eyes on his. She laughed softly.

"Why, you're nothing but a child," she teased him. "You have been thinking about marriage when you haven't the slightest conception even of the most fundamental facts of marriage."

Quite abruptly she got to her feet, leaning for a lingering moment or two on Buckhannon as she did so.

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She murmured something about making sure of their privacy. She brushed past him and went over to the door leading into the hall. She listened there an instant. She closed the door and locked it. She went to the other door at the back of the room. She listened there an instant also, then made sure that this was closed and fastened.

Buckhannon watched her.

He was well enough aware of some impending danger—a sort of a growl in his breast, such as a hound might feel in the forest at night when it scents the presence of a strange wild taint in the air. And yet there was a fascination about this as well. The room was shadowy. The room was very silent. The room was redolent of tropic breaths and fragrances. The room itself was become a jungle.

It was more of the jungle than ever as Mme. Jenesco turned swiftly from the second door and came back toward Buckhannon with her eyes fixed upon him and a smile on her lips. Her hair had become a mane. The robe she wore had slipped from one of her shoulders. It looked as if it would have fallen altogether if she hadn't clutched it about her waist. There was a sinuous grace about her. There was a sort of panting eagerness.

"Partridge is in the kitchen," she announced without other explanation. "You won't be able to see Mélissine for half an hour yet, anyway. When you came she was just preparing to take her bath."

Mme. Jenesco leaned over Buckhannon, presumably to straighten a taper in one of the wall brackets. She

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couldn't quite reach it. She had to kneel on the sofa, again lean on Buckhannon for support. She slid down beside him, one of her legs doubled up beneath her, the black silk gown in disarray, the pink lining of it falling away from the clear and solid whiteness of her throat and shoulders. Her hands were on him.

"There is so much I've wanted to tell you," she whispered, and she wasn't smiling any more. "There is so much that I could save you from. I know that no thought of evil would ever come into your dear head. You're so innocent!"

"What did you want to tell me?" asked Buckhannon.

"Oh, why should you have come back to this old house of the bad name!" she exclaimed by way of answer. "You deserve something better. It can only mean suffering for you. It has meant so much suffering to me! I've thought so much about you since that other talk we had. I feel that I hadn't ought to have said anything to you about it. But I had to. I couldn't let you throw yourself away. And I've had no one—no man—I could talk to since my husband left me——"

"I'm sorry——"

"No, be glad! He was a dirty little mutt! If I could think of any way I could pay him back!" She brought one of Buckhannon's hands to her bare breast and held it there. "See? My heart doesn't beat. He broke it. So I've brought it here where my mother lived—with *her* broken heart."

"Your mother?"

"Didn't you know?"

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"Know what?"

"That Mr. Tyrone kept my mother here——"

She broke off. She took Buckhannon's other hand and brought that one also to her breast.

"I—didn't know——" Buckhannon faltered.

"Ah, poor boy, it's an outrage for them to try and make a sucker of you! But there!" cried Mme. Jenesco, in consternation. "Perhaps I hadn't ought to have mentioned it. I ought to have guessed——"

"Guessed what?"

"Nothing; but you were so fine, so trusting!"

She held his two hands where they were with one of hers. She coiled her free hand about his face and neck. Inexplicably her bare arm had slipped about his head and she had drawn his head forward. She kissed him.

Buckhannon hated himself. There was death in his heart. Half of his heart was dead. But the other half was riotous, hot. It was that way through the whole of his being. One part of him was dead. One part of him was surging.

There was even time for a leisurely survey of this situation. In the Metropolitan Museum he had often paused to look at a piece of statuary there, although it had always struck him as crude and ugly—the effigy of two naked figures engaged in a death struggle and intended to represent man's higher self fighting against his lower. In the statue it was the better self that rose triumphant. Here and now with himself the contrary was true.

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But even while he recognized this truth, and recognized that the truth was damnation, he couldn't lift a finger to intervene. His will—his higher, civilized will—was in abeyance, utterly.

What was the higher will, anyway, compared with that other—the older, the primordial will, the will of Adam—this force that had turned the first protoplasmic cell into the squirming life of the planet—that had developed gnats and elephants—that had kept the generations of women and men unbroken in the world in spite of wars, famines, plagues, slavery, griefs, disillusionments?

So he argued with himself even while he was telling himself that he was base, foul, unspeakable, that henceforward he should know Mélissine no more.

Yet, curiously enough, he was the victim of another obsession. He was afraid that Mme. Jenesco would think that he lacked appreciation, that he wasn't grateful for the really enormous favor that she was conferring upon him.

He was haunted by the phrase: "All that a woman has to give!"

And what if he should spurn this offering of hers! Then he would be a cad! The worst of it was that even here his conscience was bothering him—accusing him of this ingratitude! He denied the accusation aloud.

"I want you to know how wonderful I think you are," he said. "I want you to know how grateful I am!"

This when his heart was breaking—a part of his heart. No; that part of his heart was already dead. Mélissine was dead. That part of him that had ever loved Mélis-

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sine was dead. Would it be the right thing now for him to marry Mme. Jenesco? Could he do anything less?

Mme. Jenesco had pressed his head to her bosom. Her fingers were playing in his hair.

Then, in a moment of silence, he heard the sound of a harp. It was Méliissine, in the adjoining room, unsuspecting of his presence, and she was playing an air that had become very dear to him. The "Indian Serenade"—

I arise from dreams of thee!

He managed to get to his feet. Without a word he went out into the hall. There he stood dizzily for a space. He left the house.

CHAPTER LI

MR. TANTALUS

HE was still dizzy when he reached the sidewalk. If such a thing were possible, he was feeling as a man might feel after having his head cut off. Figuratively speaking, he was like that. All that was best of him had been severed. The proud head was gone—that part of the human anatomy upon which so many millions of years had been devoted in the slow work of evolution. Nothing was left but his body—the part of him that was vile.

He would have walked away altogether, but he felt incapable of even a prolonged physical life. Besides, what was left to him of an intelligence—that part of his intelligence that resided like that of an alligator in his backbone—warned him that he was a spectacle. Even the street-sweepers would see how vile he was.

He had a touch of derisive humor. The street-sweepers would want to sweep him up and carry him off in their dust-bins.

The peace and the melancholy, and also the unworldliness of the old churchyard called to him. It had been a place of inspirations before—a place of cleanliness, fragrance, fresh young hope in spite of all those good

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old folks a mouldering in their graves. He wished that he was in his grave. He went around by the familiar gate at the side of the abandoned chapel. He went into the depths of the yard where the lilac and the syringa bushes would shield him from the idle curiosity of the street. When there he ventured yet closer to No. 6—so close that he could hear Méliissine still busy with her harp. He could hear her sing.

He was Tantalus. Here he was dying of thirst. There were the life-saving waters up to his chin yet out of reach—yet out of reach! He dropped down to one of the moss grown old stone benches of the place. He dropped his head into his hands.

He didn't notice it when the elderly Mr. Partridge, very clean and proper, but with a long blue apron protecting most of his clothes, came from the back garden of No. 6 and into the churchyard. Also Partridge wore a pair of heavy old gloves. He carried a trowel and a sickle. It may be mentioned that it was also part of Partridge's work—a duty purely self-imposed—to keep this graveyard looking neat. He was still butler, so to speak, to some of the earlier Tyrones who had been buried here.

And Partridge had already uprooted a number of weeds, had already cut quite a little grass—communing with himself betimes, as old folks will when thus engaged, on the sweetness of sleeping in the good brown earth with a tidy bit of lawn for coverlet, old trees standing guard, the gentle sky overhead with its

Mr. Tantalus

perpetual promise of an everlasting heaven—when he became aware of that pensive figure on the stone bench.

The stranger was exceedingly pensive, as Partridge could see—bowed low, as if crushed down by the burden on his shoulders; face hidden in his hands, as if he wished never again to confront the light of day. Partridge's sympathy was moved. He knew, however, that at times like this there was no better cure than silence and solitude—no better cure except one. But Partridge kept looking in the stranger's direction, perhaps struck by the thought that there was something familiar about him. Then Partridge made out who it was.

"Mr. Buckhannon!" he muttered.

What ailed him? Why did he sit here like this while Méliissine awaited him? What was wrong? Partridge did not know, but he suspected, as a mother might have done, how much these two young people loved each other.

Partridge sought council from the grass, from the trees, from the sky, even from the dead Tyrones. He turned and hurried back into the house.

"Eugene!"

"Méliissine!"

Buckhannon had lifted his head to find Méliissine there.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

She had remained hesitant a dozen paces from him, fear and sympathy, love and doubt, joy and pain all rippling on the surface of her.

"Oh, Méliissine!" was all he could say.

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He got to his feet. There was an added eloquence in his dark eyes, the way he put his hand to her in appeal.

"I've been waiting for you so," she said. And this fact was momentarily larger than any other. Just for the moment it was. It brought her closer to him, ready to be taken into his arms.

More than ever was Buckhannon the Tantalus.

So he had dreamed of taking her into his arms as a man dying of thirst might have dreamed of plunging his face into the waters of a pure and sparkling spring.

"You are my life! You are my hope of heaven!" he said.

How could he ever tell her about that scene through which he had just now passed with Mme. Jenesco? Why should he tell her? It would only cause her pain. And yet, how could he lie to her to the extent of acting as if nothing had happened—as if he were clean—as if he were fit?

Mélessine was sparkling clean and pure—a very well-spring of cleansing and life-giving spirit sure enough. With a contrite heart, a prayer for forgiveness, Buckhannon proclaimed the truth to himself as he tenderly embraced her.

They were hidden from the street. They were hidden from the houses back of the churchyard. So they were all alone. They were hidden even from the tombstones—not that these mattered very much; for these were like bent old men and women, blind and deaf, who had nothing to do with this world of the young any more. And

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the locust-trees shed down their special perfume like a benediction.

"Do you love me?" gasped Buckhannon at last.

As if every look and gesture of MéliSSine hadn't answered the question a thousand times!

"You know—I do."

"Say it!"

"I do"

"Say: Eugene, I love you!"

This was a ritual. She made the response in a sacred whisper: "Eugene, I love you."

She turned her head away. Her lips were parted, smiling. Her eyes were moist. He had taken her hand.

"Oh, tell me," he urged, "that you love me so much that you are ready to make this wonderful sacrifice on my account."

This brought her face around, startled.

"I'd die for you. You know I would." She panted it. And she saw such a look of humility and quivering suspense in his face that she was frightened. She drew him down to the old stone bench. They sat there looking into each other's eyes. "Why—why do you look like that?" she asked.

"It's because," he began, "I don't feel that I have any right to marry you," he stumbled on. "I'm not worthy."

"Wait," MéliSSine said.

"Why should I wait? Ever since that day in Notre Dame——"

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Buckhannon had broken off in response to something that he in turn had seen in Méliissine's face.

"Wait! Wait!" she said again. "There is so much that I shall have to tell you. I have wanted to tell you—but I couldn't tell you before."

"Nothing that you could tell me would ever make any difference," he said.

"But it would."

"No. Listen! I was going to beg of you to marry me—to marry me now—now—to save my life and to save my soul—even if I am the vilest person in the world. But I haven't wanted to be vile. I've wanted to be everything that you inspired me to be—ever since that I first looked at you from across the street—don't you remember—me standing in front of the drug-store—"

"Ah, yes! I remember!"

"—but most of all, what I have aspired to be since that day you and I were together in Notre Dame. You don't know what that day did for me. That has become my new birthday, Méliissine. I wasn't alive before that day. I had merely dreamed of life—like one of the Maeterlinck's babies in the 'Blue Bird.' Don't you remember?"

"I've never seen it."

"But you will—with me! We'll go and see everything."

"But we can't! We can't!" cried Méliissine. "I can't marry you. I don't know why, but I can't. There is something I can't understand—a whole cloud of things I can't understand. Mysteries! Dreadful, dark mysteries!"

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It would never be an easy thing for Mélissine to weep. She was not that kind—too deep, too clear, too much with a heavenly poise about her as well as her own modicum of that stern old Tyrone pride. But Mélissine wept now.

CHAPTER LII

THE ONE GREATEST THING

I'LL go into the house and I'll clear all this up for you," said Buckhannon.

Mélistine had told him all she knew. What was the mystery of this old house? Why did it have a bad name? Who was Mme. Jenesco, anyway? What was all this about Mélistine's father and Mme. Jenesco's mother? Why should Partridge have said that he was a thief when anybody would know that he wasn't a thief? Why should he have claimed that he was Mme. Jenesco's father when anybody could be equally certain that he was not?

"I'll go into the house and clear all this up for you."

A pretty big order; but Buckhannon felt equal to it. Didn't he, though! Good Lord, had there only been a dragon to fight—something like that! So he would right himself with his conscience. So he could purify himself. No, it wasn't on his own account at all. He was going to do this for Mélistine. If, afterward, when he had made his own confession, she should still deign to consider him—No! He wouldn't think of that part of it at all.

Not that Mélistine's own confession of bafflement and

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possible unworthiness had been put quite so clearly as the above questions may have implied. Half she said. Half she didn't say. Buckhannon's own riotious and rebellious thought supplied whatever was missing.

He felt the necessity for something that he could fight. That was all. And the main object of his antagonism was a very dragon indeed—to his inflamed imagination:

"And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color . . . And upon her forehead was a name written: Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth!"

If the truth be told, Mme. Jenesco would have suggested this description at this very moment. To the eye of the imagination she would have had there been any one there other than herself to behold.

She had greatly enjoyed that interview of hers with Buckhannon, even if it had not lasted so long as she might have desired. She was content. She was filled with memories—memories remote and memories recent. Some of these memories were running away back to her earliest dreams of love. She had been romantic then. She had then believed that love was a wonderful thing. Then she had known nothing of the deceptions of it, the brutal reactions of it, the limits. Limits which had been well defined; for Mme. Jenesco—although nothing at all of a philosopher in a theoretical sense—had always been a materialist. Nothing spiritual about her at all—not so far as she would ever confess. When you are dead, you

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are dead. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow you die."

Nor was she any more spiritual at this present moment than she had ever been. Quite the contrary. Nevertheless, she was thinking once more how beautiful love was, how sweet it was, how different and better it was compared to the other pleasures, so called, in this world of bitterness and disillusion.

She had prowled about a little after Buckhannon had left her. She had recoiled her hair, luxuriously, in front of a wall-mirror. She had perfumed her hands and her breast. But she had remained dressed as she was. She had returned to the place where Buckhannon had left her. The sofa was luxurious. She made it more so with additional cushions. She loved luxury—loved it as a spider, or a snake, or a panther in the jungle loves luxury—with a complete abandonment to self and the interests of self.

She coiled up amid her cushions. The room was shadowy. The air of it tepid—as if warmed of her own warmth; fragrant—as if perfumed of her own faunal fragrance.

And Buckhannon would return. He was nothing but a child—nothing but a boy—so crude, so impulsive, so unable to take care of himself—but such a lover! Love with him would be very sweet. There would be something about it to make up for all the pleasure that had been hers in the pleasure she had sought.

She was lying there half dreaming in her sultry patience—visioning jungle vistas, thinking jungle

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thoughts—when she was aroused by the sound of a voice. Buckhannon's voice! Had he returned so soon? She listened. Then a glint of rage, as keen and deadly as a red-hot needle, penetrated her heart as she caught the vibrations of another voice and became aware that Buckhannon was in the company of Mélissine. The rage went out. It had been a mere glint. But it had left its pain. She would get even with Mélissine for this. Even so, it was the Jenesco's interest in Buckhannon that overwhelmed her, even now.

She had that passionate interest in him. She savored him with whatever she had of imagination. So sure she was of what the future held that she could even take a species of yearning, premeditated joy in seeing him now with this other woman.

Hardly a woman, at that! What did Mélissine know about men!

It would be amusing to watch them. They hadn't seen her lying there amid her cushions—in the depths of the room—where the shadows were deep. It was lighter where they stood. And Buckhannon's interest was so concentrated on Mélissine; Mélissine's interest so concentrated on him! They had come into the drawing-room from the hall—had paused there as if for a final consultation.

"So far as I am concerned," said Buckhannon, "I tell you that you are the only fact in the universe that counts. You are a fact." He caught his breath a little. He confronted her. He caught her hands in his. He spoke as a man speaks when it is the heart that speaks—what

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Emerson would have called the Over Soul. "You are a fact."

It was evident that Méliissine did not grasp his meaning. For that matter, it was evident that Buckhannon himself was groping for some meaning which as yet eluded him, a meaning too great for his powers of expression. Méliissine smiled up at him shyly. There was a sparkling moment when she held her breath.

"If God had never made anything else but you," he said, "it would have been enough. He would have been God—would have been the Creator."

"You shouldn't say that," said Méliissine, touched with awe.

"I do say it," Buckhannon returned, all devotion—devotion for Méliissine and the subject of his discourse. "God put you in the world so that we shouldn't forget—so that we shouldn't think that everything was wrong—bad——" He broke off. His declaration became more personal. "Oh, Méliissine! I was like that. I am like that still. But when I am here in your presence, I want to take all that is vile in me—crucify it——"

There were tears in his voice, but his voice, while soft, was passionate and clear. His eyes were brilliant. They burned. They burned with a quality that took the color from Méliissine's face, gave her a sort of unearthly quality that justified the nature of his tribute. She faltered a struggling sentence:

"All that you say I am to you, you are to me!"

There was no discordance in Buckhannon's action as

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he slid down to one knee—this was all devotional and apostolic—and hid his face against her dress and hand. He was the sinner demanding pardon.

On Mélissine's face was a mystical light.

CHAPTER LIII

THE WHITE HUNTSMAN

MME. JENESCO lay perfectly still. One would have said that even her thought lay still. No formula of words came into her mind at all. Even her passions were in abeyance. They say that certain wild creatures of the forest contain themselves like that in the presence of the Unknown. There are even those who say that these brute things have the power of seeing ambassadors from the Unknown invisible to men—that most animals see ghosts and gods. Mme. Jenesco was like that now—although she may not have known it herself.

The chances were that she was not thinking of herself. Sentient, warmed, coiled, furred, and as capable of swift physical brutalities as any animal, she lay there fascinated as might have been a coiled black tiger on the edge of a moonlit glade where a pair of strange white birds were mating.

It was only by degrees that her own sense of the situation developed into something else.

It was only by degrees that she could get the nature and the purpose of what Buckhannon was trying to express. For this also was weird to the dominant strain in Mme. Jenesco's make-up.

The White Huntsman

Love! She thought that she had known all about love. What she had taken to be love had been the chief occupation of her life. She had heard all sorts of men—and women, too—talk about it. She had watched their reactions when they were dominated by it. She had always known that it was complex—that some it rendered mean, some it rendered generous! some mild, some murderous.

But she had never suspected anything like this. She had never heard anything like this.

"You are so small and so frail," said Buckhannon; "but you are the one indestructible thing. You are greater than kings or armies. You are beauty. You are perfection. The Lord of Hosts knew what he was doing when He made you the keeper of life. You are the vestal—the keeper of the flame."

Mélistine laughed softly for sheer happiness. She said:

"If all men were so noble!"

"They would be if all women were like you."

"I am no better than any one else."

"You are not only the keeper of the flame," said Buckhannon, pursuing his thought, "you are the temple itself. You are the Holy of Holies."

He was still on one knee. But he was no longer hiding his face. His arms rested lightly around Mélistine's waist. He was looking up at her. His eyes glowed. She was yielding to his embrace. She was smiling down at him. One of her hands was on his shoulder. With the other she lightly brushed his temple, his head.

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"I have dreamed of becoming such a wonderful architect," he said.

"You will become one of the greatest—you will become the greatest architect in the world," said Méliissine.

"But even if I become the greatest architect in the world," he perused with reverent contemplation, "I shall still be crude. What is the work of any architect compared to you? Where is there a foundation so miraculous as your feet—or a tower of a million rooms that can sway to music like your body, and crowned with a capital like your head?"

He collected his thought—while Méliissine smiled, while Mme. Jenesco, unseen, groveled, so to speak, in her lair. He went on:

"When I look at you I see the Taj Mahal. I see it white, reflected in the lake, between the cypress-trees. I see it blue in the moonlight. I see it pink in the dawn. They were trying for a perfection like yours when they laid out the Halls of Karnak, when they built the palace of Sennacherib, when they planted the hanging gardens of Babylon."

The words brought recurrent stabs to Mme. Jenesco lying there. To her no man had ever talked like this. At times she couldn't see very distinctly, and it was as if her sight was beclouded with a sort of bloody mist. At times she no longer heard what Buckhannon was saying. This was when a whispering roar deafened her to all else—then when she was hearing again the things that men had said to her—when she held them in leash—when they

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knelt at her feet—when they put their passion in words—words to make the very soul of her to blush.

"You are the perfect idea," said Buckhannon with repressed fire; "the idea that the Greeks worshiped when they reared their temples on the Acropolis."

"I want to be," said Mélissine.

"When they built St. Mark's in Venice they went everywhere looking for beautiful things with which to decorate it. God Himself did the same for you!"

"You're so wonderful," said Mélissine.

"He experimented with flowers and waterfalls, dawns, and sunsets," said Buckhannon. "He made a billion, billion lilies and roses, then fairies and saints. Then—you, O my Mélissine!"

"If I were only worthy of such love," breathed Mélissine.

Her words were a mere faint echo of the wonder in her eyes, her heightened color, her parted lips. She seemed to be yielding more and more to the magnetic coil of the arms that held her. Her body curved like the stem of one of those lilies Buckhannon had mentioned.

"I love you," whispered Buckhannon."

"And I love you—I love you so!"

Mélissine was curving lower.

For some time now a certain chill had been creeping up about Mme. Jenesco—there, where she lay and watched this scene. A certain fear had begun to play about her like an impish light, cool and uncanny. She had tried to twitch the feeling away. She had tried to

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call her familiar resources to her aid. This was a comedy she was looking at. She ought to laugh. But she did not laugh. The actors were amateurs. She ought to hiss and boo. But she did not hiss or boo. Instead, something like a sob came up from her breast. She called this rage, and knew that it was not.

It was grief—a poignant grief. That was what it was. But a grief for what?

And while she was still trying to get this curious question adjusted in her brain, she felt a stab of pain, and the pain brought fear.

She was still the jungle beast. She was still the black panther. To some extent she was. But she was no longer lying in ambush, slumbrous, luxurious, with her lust for fresh blood. She felt that she was trapped. She wanted to get away from where she was but she could not. Here she was being thrust at. She was being killed by inches.

She was not only trapped.

But right over there back of this boy and this girl—back of this jungle pair of sacred white birds she had watched at their mating—it was as if a great white huntsman had appeared; it was as if this huntsman were armed with bow and arrows. He was shooting her with his arrows. Each arrow was barbed.

"You thought you knew men!"

"You thought you knew love!"

"You thought you knew beauty!"

"You thought to defile what was pure!"

But she didn't move until Buckhannon and Mélissine

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were gone—not until what seemed to be a long time after they were gone. Then she sat up, somehow aware that her hurts were no mere matter of a passing fancy. She felt feverish. She felt disfigured and scarred.

Just what had happened to her? She didn't know.

She only knew that these cushions that had been so soft and tepid a little while ago were now become as hot cinders to her touch. The silk of her robe clawed at her skin like camel's hair. The perfume had become a stench.

She had difficulty with her breathing.

"God! God!" she gasped.

And she snatched at her robe with fingers like talons. She snatched it apart. This at least was an element of the self-expression she sought. She hated herself. She hated everything about herself. She clutched the silken stuff again. She wrenched it. She ripped it. She tore it.

As she started to her feet obedient to this same need of violence, she caught a reflection of herself in the mirror across the room. She had thought that she was beautiful. She had thought that she had made herself beautiful.

"Oh! Oh!"

Even her voice was ugly.

She beat at her face with her fists. She tore at her hair as she had torn at her dress. She called herself vile names. She was possessed with a frenzy of self-destruction. And all the time there were running in her brain the lava-streams of thought incident to this erup-

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tion. They were as logical, these thoughts of hers, as all primal things in nature.

She had sought love. She had sought beauty. It was these things that she had depended on that had betrayed her. She had betrayed herself. Sometime, somewhere, she had heard that there was such a thing as a sin against the Holy Ghost, and that this was the one unpardonable sin. And this she had never understood. But now she understood. This sin, she had committed it.

"God! God!" she cried again.

But this time her accent was different.

She had hurled herself at last to the floor half recumbent against the sofa, still hurt and unappeased. But the paroxysm had passed. She was mute and still, even to the heart of her.

There Partridge found her.

Partridge had come into the room silently. He had been looking for her. Here she was. But Partridge looked and looked before he gave any sign of his presence. Even then he approached so softly that he was standing just over her before he spoke.

There may have occurred many thoughts to Partridge. It may have occurred to him that here was the daughter of that girl that Nathan Tyrone had found crushed and desperate one night more than thirty years ago. It may have occurred to him that this present girl was not to blame—oh, not to blame for anything! No one was to blame for anything, perhaps, if all the facts were only to be known. Of course, there were things that people

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didn't like—things that people should try to correct. But surely there was no place in the world for blame.

Judge not! Judge not! Sympathy and knowledge were better.

"There, there," said Partridge.

And it was almost as if he were speaking to Mélissine, and Mélissine a little girl again having hurt herself.

CHAPTER LIV

OUT OF THE FULL HEART

WHAT Partridge had come to tell Mme. Jenesco was that Mr. Buckhannon wished to speak to her. And Partridge gently urged her to do this. Not a word from Partridge as to what might have happened to her.

"I'm a nice one to see any one," said Mme. Jenesco. "I look like a freak."

The eruption had left her calm.

"Put a little cold water on your face," said Partridge, "and nothing will be noticed. You can go up to your room by the back way. They won't see you. I'll tell them that you are changing your dress."

"What does he want to see me about?"

"I don't know. I imagine he desires to question you."

"What about?"

Partridge was apologetic. His voice was kind. But he came out with the salutary truth.

"I imagine it is concerning your status—and mine."

"Yours!"

"I believe that Miss Tyrone has informed him—of my use—or misuse—of Miss Tyrone's money."

Out of the Full Heart

Mme. Jenesco laughed—a harsh little laugh, devoid, however, of either humor or offense.

"Well, what shall I tell him?"

"I don't presume to give you advice," said Partridge humbly.

"Give it anyway," said Mme. Jenesco. "I'd about as lief take your advice as the advice of any man I know."

"Thank you"—and there was no mistaking the fact that Partridge's gratitude was sincere.

"Go on!" Mme Jenesco urged. "What do you advise?"

Partridge's voice was still apologetic to a degree. His whole attitude was apologetic and gentle.

"My advice," he said, "is merely to obey your conscience—say what your conscience dictates, and do what it tells you to do. And—and—don't be unhappy. If I can be of service to you in any way——"

"All right," said Mme. Jenesco, without apparent emotion. "Tell him I'll be down—I'll see him here—in fifteen minutes."

Mme. Jenesco was an entirely different woman from the one that Buckhannon had seen earlier in the day. She appeared to be. So she was in fact, most likely. There may be no such thing as a sudden conversion, but there are most certainly sudden changes of personality. Sometimes these changes are permanent—one personality being submerged—as if drowned and henceforth dead; some other personality coming up to play the dominant rôle in this theater which is the human body.

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The tiger, the jungle-thing, had disappeared from Mme. Jenesco. For the time being it had, at any rate—slain by the white arrows of that mystical huntsman, possibly.

She was dressed differently—dressed in her favorite black, but decently and soberly.

Buckhannon had been the more embarrassed of the two. He had been expecting almost anything—almost anything but this. She greeted him almost as a stranger would have greeted him; but even this attitude was not exaggerated. She was neither friendly nor unfriendly. She was polite but not too polite.

There at first an impertinent small voice kept dinging at his brain: "A little while ago you were making love to this woman, and she was making love to you. You even thought that you might have to marry her. Didn't you? You were a fool. Weren't you? You thought that the whole universe had gone to blazes. Didn't you? This shows you how important you are."

"Sit down," said Mme. Jenesco. And she herself sat down. "What do you wish to ask me?"

"I wanted to ask you so many things," said Buckhannon. "They are things that concern Miss Tyrone's happiness."

Mme. Jenesco, in spite of her new poise, was too restless to remain seated. She seemed to be undecided as to just what to say. She was still undecided apparently as she turned and slowly walked to the end of the room and back again. During this slow promenade she did not once look at Buckhannon. There was no

Out of the Full Heart

doubt but that she was doing some hard thinking. Both her voice and her bearing were changed when she next spoke. She had come to a stand in front of Buckhannon. She faced him rather as a man would face him. She was through with her rôle of enchantress.

"I'm going to talk straight to you," she said, then paused.

"I wish you would," he affirmed.

"I may be a fool," she continued, "but I'm going to trust you." There was a touch of grim humor about it when she added: "I swore I would never trust any man again. Many a woman has sworn the same thing—but they go on trusting them."

Buckhannon spoke up: "I don't want you to say anything that you'll regret later. I'm thinking of Miss Tyrone."

"So am I," she answered, with slow thoughtfulness. "You love her all right. I don't have to be told. And she loves you. That ought to be enough, God knows! But it isn't. It never is. If it was, this earth wouldn't be such a rotten place to live on. I suppose I'll have to speak out. Otherwise, even if you and her do get married and go on loving each other you'll always have some doubt in your mind, and it'll get worse and worse; then, some day, there'll come some little quarrel or other, and the doubt will start you to saying things."

"Oh, no," Buckhannon began; "that——"

But Mme. Jenesco stopped him with a gesture. Her attitude took on a tinge of challenge.

"When I first came here," she said, "I did have some

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vague idea that Nathan Tyrone was my father. At least, I pretended that I believed it—pretended even to myself. But it isn't so. I knew it wasn't so. I was bluffing myself. Do you want to know what brought me here? I'll tell you. Partridge said it: blackmail! That's what it was."

Buckhannon had sunk back in his chair. "What makes you tell me this?" he asked. He had chosen at random merely one of the many questions buzzing in his thought.

"It's on my own account," Mme. Jenesco replied, with almost her first gust of real feeling. "It's for my own sake. I'm making it as ugly as I can so I won't try it again."

"Do you mean that you might have tried it again?" Buckhannon queried. He had been hearing about blackmail all his life, but now that he found it here right in front of him, so to speak, he was rather dazed.

"I don't know," the woman responded, desperately. "I might slip back. Good God! Ain't we all apt to be tempted?"

Buckhannon winced. "Yes," he said; "we are."

"I've always laughed at this reformation stuff," she went on. And she tried to laugh, but she didn't succeed very well. "I can tell you this, though, that I've been up against something too big for me ever since I came here. It's got me. I'm not myself. I'm not my old self. I'm changed. Just now, when we came in here together, I thought that I could con you. I thought that I could jolly you along. And I could have done it—just a few hours ago. Oh, it wouldn't have been anything against

Out of the Full Heart

you. I know men, even when they *are* in love with a decent girl!"

She was on the point of tears, but she was too strong to give in. Still, she was willing to be helped.

"What made you change?" Buckhannon asked.

Buckhannon felt that he had been groping in the dark hitherto. He felt now that over this darkness there had come a flush of red light. But whether this flush presaged the dawn of a better day or a fresh impending catastrophe he was still unable to say. He sat there silent while Mme. Jenesco sought in her own mind—that her answer might be just.

CHAPTER LV

BLOOD OF THE LAMB

THE girl was partly responsible," said Mme. Jenesco, as she resumed her pacing. "Any one else would have called the police. She didn't. She would have stood for anything. She was that kind. It would have been easier for me if she hadn't been such a saint. Oh, the world can say what it wants to about the clever ones, the cunning ones, the wise ones, the sort who never trust and who never believe. They're the marks. The really wise ones are the so-called suckers."

All this disjointed, a bit tumultuous, while Mme. Jenesco kept up her restless pacing.

"I agree with you there," Buckhannon assented.

"But she wasn't everything," flashed Mme. Jenesco, turning upon him as if for fear that he were already giving too much credit where the credit was not due. She drew up a chair in front of him and plumped herself into it. She had forgotten herself by this time. "After all," she said, "it was the old man."

"Mr. Partridge?"

"Yes, Mr. Partridge."

She tried to sound Buckhannon's innermost thought

Blood of the Lamb

with her eyes. Buckhannon perceived her concern.

"I've always felt that his intentions were good," Buckhannon affirmed.

"Say," Mme. Jenesco demanded, softly, "what do you know about him claiming to be my father?"

"Well, wasn't he?"

"If he was," said Mme. Jenesco with real reverence, "I'd get down on my knees and thank God—and also to ask His pardon for having led the kind of life I have led."

"I don't understand," said Buckhannon—not altogether truthfully; but he was baffled by her tone.

There was a touch of scorn in Mme. Jenesco's answer.

"You've lived here in New York, haven't you? And you've lived in Paris. You know something of the world. You don't think for a minute, do you, that a man like him could be my father?"

Buckhannon was a bit stifled.

"All sorts of women have had fine fathers," he said.

"All sorts of women have fine qualities in them."

"It's because you're a boy who can say things like that," Mme. Jenesco returned, "that I'm talking to you like this now. But it's the old gentleman, I tell you, who has made me feel ashamed of myself. I'm not staying here now on my own account; I've lost my nerve, I tell you. You're going to think I'm lying, aren't you? You're going to say: 'Why, just now she was trying to vamp me, and now listen at her! Trying to work the old reform! Pulling the sob stuff!'"

"Not at all," Buckhannon declared.

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"I'm glad of that," said Mme. Jenesco, "because I was never more earnest in my life. Even if that dear old soul wasn't my father I feel as if he was—I feel as I would feel if he had been."

"But if he isn't your father, why did he say he was?" Buckhannon was at a loss.

"Because he was sacrificing himself. That was why. He said that he was my father so that no suspicion could fall on Mélissine's father or on Mélissine herself. He was sacrificing himself, I tell you. Do you know what that means? Most men don't."

"I'd be willing to sacrifice myself—for Mélissine," said Buckhannon, flushing slightly under Mme. Jenesco's gaze.

"I hope it's the truth," she said, without sarcasm. "They all say that—and some of them believe it—before they're married; but God pity most of the girls later on—when they *are* married, when they're not so good-looking, or when they're sick, or when they begin to get gray. I'm not knocking you, you understand. I'm merely saying that there are mighty few Partridges in this world."

"And you mean," Buckhannon demanded, "that he also sacrificed himself on your and your mother's account?"

"How so?"

"By stealing all that money."

"Him? I bet he never stole a nickel in his life."

"But he said he did."

"There's a mystery there," Mme. Jenesco confessed.

Blood of the Lamb

"I believe that he lied when he said that he stole that money. My idea is that Mr. Tyrone sent us the money himself and that Partridge wouldn't admit it so that I wouldn't have even that leg to stand on if the thing came into the courts. I know that Mr. Tyrone was that sort of a man. He was that sort or he wouldn't have brought my mother here in the first place. And Partridge merely lied about himself to frame an alibi. Talk about your sacrifice! He would have let me send him to prison before he would have given me the chance to hang anything on the man whose servant he had been."

"But surely," Buckhannon said, "there was some other way. Partridge must have known that there was nothing to fear from the truth."

Mme. Jenesco shook her head.

"Take it from me," she declared, "the truth is the only thing that he is afraid of. It's that way with a lot of the good ones. That's nothing against them, you understand. It only means that we all got a lot in common. What makes the difference, after all? It's the heart. It's what you stand ready to do for some one else. It's willingness to be the goat. That's what puts old man Partridge above the level. That's what has made me ashamed of myself, and that's what keeps me here."

"How so—keeps you here?"

"Because"—she let her voice drop to a whisper—"this time he is getting ready to pull something that he hadn't ought to."

"What?"

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She looked at him meaningly, but Buckhannon couldn't grasp what her meaning was. He said so.

"You've told me this much," he said. "You might as well tell me all that there is to tell. I'm your friend. I'm Partridge's friend."

"I believe you are," she admitted, seriously. "I haven't found anything but friendship since I got into this house. Maybe that would be the case with the whole world if we only got next to each other better. There must be many an old grouch walking around with a broken heart. Many a tough girl has times, believe me, when she says her prayers just like the other kind." This was an autobiographical touch perhaps. She hastily ended the digression. She asked: "Do you know that little druggist across the street?"

"Yes."

"So do I. He told me. He's a liar about a lot of things, but I know he told the truth this time. I could tell it from the way that Partridge has been acting. Partridge had an old prescription. He's had it filled."

But before Mme. Jenesco could complete her revelation, whatever it was, they heard a door click at the back of the hall—a gentle, almost imperceptible click. It was Partridge who closed a door like that. They heard his light, but rather dragging footfall—the footfall of an old man—and they knew that he was approaching.

Neither Buckhannon nor Mme. Jenesco spoke—they sat there rather guiltily—as Partridge appeared at the door and entered.

CHAPTER LVI

ONE DAY'S GRACE

PARTRIDGE seemed to be absorbed in his own thoughts. His eyes were downcast. His back was bowed. Still he was not forgetful of his service. He went over to the windows and adjusted the shades, making sure that none of them varied by so much as an inch from the elevation of its neighbors. By the last window he stood for a longish spell looking out. The shutters of the old house were no longer kept so tightly closed—now that Nathan Tyrone was no longer there following the family tradition. Those closed shutters had meant “not at home” to purely theoretical callers, when Nathan Tyrone, and his father, and his grandfather, had been alive.

Buckhannon cleared his throat.

Partridge was so absorbed he did not hear.

“Oh, Mr. Partridge!” Buckhannon called.

“I am here, sir!”—and then Partridge recognized his mistake. There for a moment he must have thought that it was Nathan Tyrone who called him, in spite of that preliminary “Mr.”

“Mr. Buckhannon, sir!”

He seemed to be relieved when he saw Mme. Jenesco's smile.

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"I—I beg pardon," he apologized. "I thought the room was unoccupied." He himself smiled. And he would have retired at once, after the manner of a well-trained servant.

But Buckhannon stayed him. "I should like to speak to you also if I may," Buckhannon said.

Buckhannon had risen to his feet. Buckhannon was deferential and intended to show that he was deferential. But so was Partridge deferential. Partridge murmured something about always being at your service, sir.

"I wanted to tell you first of all," said Buckhannon, "that I have asked Miss Tyrone to—to confer the honor upon me—I know that I am not good enough—but nevertheless—you will understand——"

"Perfectly, sir."

Partridge was as calm as Buckhannon was agitated.

"I've asked her to marry me," Buckhannon plunged. He was really announcing this to Mme. Jenesco.

"Permit me, sir, to offer my profound congratulations."

This was straight from the heart. Partridge's voice was tremulous with emotion when he said it. But he wasn't all emotion. At the same time any one could have seen that he was thinking. Buckhannon wanted to say something about the possibility that it was not yet time for congratulations, but Partridge had reached the end of at least one train of thought. He put in with:

"Will you permit me, sir?"

Buckhannon nodded.

One Day's Grace

"But the late Mr. Tyrone started to tell you something, I believe; when the progress of his malady made it impossible for him to proceed."

"Yes," Buckhannon whispered. At least this item of the general mystery was to be cleared.

Still it was a second or two before Partridge could proceed. Partridge begged pardon. He used his handkerchief. He ventured an appealing look at both Buckhannon and Mme. Jenesco. A sense of delicacy caused Mme. Jenesco to stroll away and look at a picture.

"Mr. Tyrone spoke about it on the night of his death," said Partridge. "He commissioned me to give you his message should occasion arise. I dare say that it would be proper to do so now."

Buckhannon spoke urgently:

"You may tell me. I confess that I have often wondered what it was. But whatever it is, it will make no difference."

Partridge regarded him with an added shade of distress.

"I shouldn't say that, sir," Partridge quavered.

"But it's the truth." After all, this was no mere servant to whom he was speaking. This was Mélassine's friend—her best and oldest friend. "Do you think," he demanded, "that anything that any one could tell me about Miss Tyrone would make me think the less of her?"

He would have said more, but words failed him to convey his idea of such a monstrous suggestion. Besides, Partridge was speaking again.

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"Oh! Oh!" Partridge had exclaimed. "So that was it! You are worthy, sir—if you will permit me to say it; doubly worthy! And Mr. Tyrone, his spirit, will know; will bless you. That was the very nature of his message."

"What?"

"He wished to tell you that his daughter was not as other young ladies—that she was an angel—that only through a proper sense of this, and a proper devotion—I am but quoting what he would have said to you, sir—could any man, even you, sir—and you will understand—could be worthy of her. That was what he wanted to say."

"And that was all?" Buckhannon succeeded in getting the question out after one long breath. There had come to him even the glint of hope that so would all darkness fade when the truth came out. "There was nothing else?"

"Nothing else, sir—except that Mr. Tyrone seemed to be convinced that you would show yourself to be worthy." Partridge met Buckhannon's eye. What he saw there was a confusion of thought, a sympathy for himself perhaps and yet a glint of pain. "Did you think that there was something else?"

"You know that I did," Buckhannon answered quietly. "You know that I must have thought so."

"There was nothing, sir. Perhaps you will permit me, as one so long associated with the family—and honorably, I trust—at least as one who has always had Miss Tyrone's welfare deeply—oh, most deeply—at heart——"

One Day's Grace

Partridge cast a glance in the direction whither Mme. Jenesco had retreated. She was out of earshot. He brought his distressed old eyes back to Buckhannon's young and friendly ones.

"I wish to tell you, sir——"

Partridge spoke quaveringly, in a hurried, broken whisper, as one might who cons a full volume with but a limited time to do it in. And it did not help him at all, so far as coherence of statement was concerned, that just then various strands of music, silvery and faint, came drifting into the room. Mélissine, left to her own devices, had again turned to her harp. There were the first few preliminary chords, just to see that the instrument was in tune. But her mood must have been solemn. The chords became unmistakable. An old hymn:

"Nearer My God to Thee."

"I am aware," said Partridge, "that this has been a house with a bad name. But if there have been grounds for the tradition, the tradition has been no less essentially false. Oh, sir; there has been grief here, misunderstanding, heartache; but in what house has there not been such? And nothing vile!—nothing vile in the sight of the Lord! Yes, there has been pride! But it has been an honorable pride. It was a pride I shared. I also suffered. But I have tried to keep the faith."

It was as if an angelic refrain furnished the overtone:

E'en tho' it be a cross
That raiseth me . . .

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"Mr. Partridge," Buckhannon began.

"Just Partridge, sir."

"Comrade," said Buckhannon. "Tell me what it is—this secret that has been bearing down on you so hard."

"There was none——"

"Yes there was, and is. Let me share it."

There was negation on Partridge's lips, but his eyes could not lie. His eyes spoke now. His eyes were saying that there was something—oh, that there had been something all along; that not for anything in the world would he reveal to her who played the harp back there. But so were there words in Buckhannon's steady look. The words constituted a demand that Partridge yield his secret.

Just then the music stopped. The harpist let out a hail:

"Where is every one? May I come in?"

"Not a word, sir. Not now," Partridge implored.

"When then?" Buckhannon demanded.

"To-morrow," said Partridge. "Yes; I think that I may tell you, sir; that by to-morrow everything will be cleared up."

"No foolishness," said Buckhannon soberly.

"Ah, no, sir," Partridge promised; "the Lord be my witness!"

CHAPTER LVII

"ULALUME"

THIS was the eve of the second day of June—a date important in the history of many a New York family, but no more important than other dates to other families; a date important enough to the denizens of Cinnamon Street, however; more important than they presently suspected.

Still, one would have said that old Mr. Partridge knew, seated up there in that chaste and somewhat monkish room of his on the top floor of No. 6. For Partridge, even more than usual, was meditating on the respective blessings of life and death, his eyes fixed on that calendar that Méliissine had given him. His eyes were on the date, and, although he was long past seeing either date or motto, he had the date by memory:

June 2: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace!"

"The end of that man is peace," Partridge repeated to himself; "the end of that man is peace. Ah, blessed promise! How many toil and sweat and tremble; how many strive, how many hunger, how many soothe a sick child or hunt the child that is lost! And yet their ends shall be peace."

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But all this part of the old gentleman's thought was like the quivering end of a search-light: soaring high, picking out clouds no human eye could see, losing itself in infinities; while all the time the director of this search-light had his feet on earth, and he himself preoccupied with earthly problems. "Even if I told Mr. Buckhan-non—no, I cannot tell him. But I have promised."

The problem was difficult.

"He is the soul of honor," said Partridge. "He is a gentleman. I know that he would never mention the matter to Mélissine were I to ask him not to do so. But have I the right to put a secret between them at the very outset of their nuptial career—put a serpent, belikes, in their garden? Guidance, O Lord!"

And ever that answer from the other part of his brain:

"The end of that man is peace!"

"I am far from perfect," said Partridge; but something of the Tyrone pride spoke up within him, and he added: "and yet have I tried. It is not too late. It is never too late. Grant that I be perfect—just this once—that I may know peace, and give peace."

To the highly imaginative—had there been such familiar with all the circumstances—it would have seemed that the dark angel was in Cinnamon Street this night undecided as to which of two old men he should choose; the dark angel, Azrael, who hovers over the dying—although many of these do not know that they are such—and helps the soul to quit the body; undecided and

hesitant, although to-night he will be busy as usual. To-night, in New York alone, from fifty to a hundred will require his presence, mostly old people, like these certain two old men of Cinnamon Street, or the very, very young.

The other old man is Goodenough, the poetic cabby.

Early this night he had come weaving into Cinnamon Street, "with vine-leaves in his hair," as the poet said. He had been on his way to the hay-mow that was his home; he who had been so gallant these thirty years ago. But the churchyard had called him. Perhaps it was the fragrance of the locust-bloom. Perhaps it was the memory of the young people he had seen loitering there earlier in the day. Perhaps it was an earlier recollection.

In any case he had watched with vinous cunning to make sure that the policeman, Hickcock, was not on this part of his beat. He was in no mood for such an audience as Hickcock even might give him, although talking to Hickcock was like talking to a tree or a troll.

Goodenough passed, therefore, unperceived through the gate by the chapel and found himself in the fragrant depths of a seclusion such as the churchyard furnished him. He found a place where the grass was deep. There he composed himself to rest and meditate. He was in one of his most poetic states; lulled, body and brain, by the wine he had taken; but that inner self of his awake, upstanding, with alabaster fingers ready set to the strings of a golden lyre.

The House With a Bad Name

So he perceived himself.

So he had often perceived himself before.

But this night it was altogether different, and he discovered this with a thrill of happiness.

Hitherto there had always been the sub-feeling that presently the fumes of the wine would pass, and that he would wake up again, and that once more he would be Goodenough the sodden, Goodenough the cabby, old Goodenough, the man with the face he was ashamed to look at. But now he was the poet of the golden lyre. He saw himself standing slim and graceful, an Apollo, with smooth, round arms and legs, curly hair crowned with laurel. The lyre was solid to his touch. He smote the strings. He heard a quaver of melody so rich that it brought the tears to his eyes—tears of gratitude that there should be such music.

Then a queer thing happened to Goodenough—a very queer thing. It was something he wished he could set down in immortal verse for the instruction and solace of all such as he.

He was in two places at once. He was two persons at once. Nay, three! One of him was the Goodenough he had stretched on the grass. The other of him continued to be the godlike creature of the lyre. And some sort of a struggle was going on between the two, with himself aware of the fact, somewhat as a third personality, but unable to intercede except by a sort of mute desire. He wanted the godlike creature to win. And this hadn't been going on very long before another spectator had joined the group—subsequent events proved

"Ulalume"

that this may have been Hickcock. And to him the Goodenough who was godlike cried out:

"Friend Azrael?"

"Come along," said Azrael. "I will give you a hand."

"I have loved you; I have sung to you," said Goodenough the godlike. "I knew that you would not fail me now."

"Why came ye here?" asked Azrael.

"I sought her:

By the door of a legended tomb;

'Ulalume—Ulalume—

"—were stopped by the door of a tomb—

'Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume.'"

Then Goodenough experienced a slight shock, a dissolution of all that had kept him uncertain, and he had become merged utterly with the godlike one, so that he himself was the godlike one and the godlike one was he. Suddenly his limbs were light. His back was supple and strong. His soul was music.

He felt nothing but joy even when he heard the angel Azrael—or was it Hickcock?—cry out that he was dead, that Goodenough was dead. For Goodenough himself knew better. He, the real Goodenough, was never so much alive. This was youth. This was of the very essence of life—life everlasting. He smote his lyre again, and this time there was the stirring of a thousand musical echoes; like the free concert of the choral society he had once attended: "Glory to God in the highest!"

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But right in the midst of this joy unspeakable he felt the pang of a yearning. He would seek her now—the one he had come to seek. Caparisoned like this he would show himself to her.

And all this time, there at a darkened window in No. 6, a window that overlooked the chapel-yard, was Mme. Jenesco, the woman who was the daughter of her whom Goodenough had loved and who may have been, most likely was, Goodenough's own daughter. No wonder some sort of an extra pang came to her, although she knew nothing of what was going on there under the locust-trees and among the tombstones; no wonder she felt an extra pang of loneliness!

To whom could she turn? There was only one. And yet she thought of him with a sudden start, for she had thought again of that prescription that Partridge had had filled.

“What if, after all——”

Terror winged her feet as she fled through the dark and silent old house in the direction of Partridge's room. She sped up the dark stairs—a mere ghost of a woman; a mere ghost of her former self.

CHAPTER LVIII

SO MUCH FOR SO MUCH

IT may be mentioned here and now that Goodenough—the earthly part of him at any rate—did die this night. Late in the night he had been discovered by his friend, the policeman of this beat, Jerome Hickcock by name.

“At first,” said Hickcock, “I was for thinkin’ him drunk again, especially when he begins to pull the old poetry on me again, and to talk about the dame he was stuck on once. ‘Come along,’ I says, ‘I’ll bed you down,’ I says. You know, sort o’ jokin’. And with his hand in mine—a dom fine man; a man wit’ a heart.”

A great funeral they gave to Goodenough. Hickcock was for paying for it himself, but Pliny saw to that—Pliny the younger. “He was no good any more,” said Pliny; “but he was a friend of my old man’s.”

Epitaph enough for any old gentleman.

Partridge was forgetful of all else when he heard a knock on his door. It reminded him of old times—when Nathan Tyrone was young and sought his company, or when Mélissine was a little girl. He raised himself from the edge of his couch with surprising agil-

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ity. He was at the door in a moment, had flung it open. The candle flickered in the sudden gust of air. For a moment he was seeing no one. Then he saw her.

"Mme. Jenesco!"

"I—I wanted to talk to you," she said.

She had undressed herself for the night, but she had drawn a peignoir over her night-dress. There was no paint on her face.

"Pray come in," said Partridge. He stood aside to let her pass.

She looked about her—the one candle flickering in its porcelain candlestick, the open but shuttered window where a scant and worn but perfectly clean chintz curtain fluttered on its cotton string, the small white dresser, the solitary wooden chair, the narrow white cot.

"You were still up," she said.

It was an allusion to the fact that Partridge was still fully dressed.

"I seldom retire early," he said. "And"—he hoped she would not think that he was blaming her in any way—"here lately I have not been sleeping very well."

"Oh, it wasn't for that——"

"Won't you be seated?"

She sat down. "I was worried about you," she said, changing the current but not the purport of what she had started to say. "I've seen enough of the world where such things happen. I knew about your buying that chloral."

"Oh!" said Partridge. He looked at her a little more intently.

So Much for So Much

She had seated herself. She sought for a time to avoid his eyes, but finally she faced him as he resumed his place on the edge of his cot. A little color came into her pale face.

"I've been pretty rotten," she said, "but I didn't want that on my conscience."

"Want what on your conscience?"

"Wasn't it for that you bought the chloral?"

"You mean—to destroy myself?"

"Yes."

Partridge closed his eyes. He bowed his head. He seemed to realize as for the first time just what his intentions really had been with regard to the chloral. Then he let his old eyes drift to Mélissine's calendar.

"I've known a girl or two who took it for the same reason," said Mme. Jenesco. "They took it because they wanted to be rid of it all."

"Girls? When they had youth——"

"That's what got their nerve," Mme. Jenesco enlightened. "It wouldn't have mattered so much if they were old. Then it would have been over for them before long anyway. But, being young, and knowing that they might go on getting the rotten end of it for another fifty years or so—oh! I don't blame them! I don't blame them!"

Partridge reflected.

"I know that there is suffering in the world," he said. "I know that there are so many things that we do not understand, that it does seem at times as if life were in vain, times when we say: 'What does it all

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amount to?" But, even when the world is darkest, there is a candle lighted somewhere in the depths of us——"

His thought became so spiritual that his voice was insufficient and flickered into silence.

"There are a lot of things you don't know about," said Mme. Jenesco, not without sympathy.

"True," said Partridge. "I have been spared many things. I have been granted many blessings. I seem to have forgotten them here of late. I have tried; there has been something——" He bowed his head, again, suddenly tired and weak.

The spectacle of his bowed head, so clean and glistening white in the candle-light, seemed to move Mme. Jenesco greatly.

"Listen," she said. "I'm sorry that I ever said what I did. I'd rather die myself than make you any trouble. I'll go away to-morrow, and you'll never hear of me again. I swear I will. Don't be so broken up. I can't stand it to see you like that. I'll go back to the old life, I will, and take what's coming to me. It's all I'm fit for. I didn't know that there were people like you in the world. I merely thought that there were the rich and the poor, the lucky and the unlucky, God's favorites and the Godforsaken. I was tired of being one of the goats. I wanted—peace!"

"Peace, peace!" he murmured.

Partridge did not yet look up. Perhaps she thought that he hadn't heard her. She kneeled down in front of him and tried to lift his face.

"Old man," she coaxed.

So Much for So Much

"What is it?" Partridge's voice was thick but mild.

"Think of *me*," she said. "I've come nearer to loving you than I've ever loved any one in the world before. My mother was no good. They were a joke to me—all these mother-songs."

"You shouldn't say that, my child," Partridge gently reproved.

But she pursued her line of thought.

"And as for a father! Wouldn't I be proud, though, if I had a father like you! I'd tell the world I would. And I'd show the world by being decent, I would. God, when I think how I treated you—the things I said to you! But you'll forgive me, won't you?"

"I forgive you; and I dare say so will He."

This latter statement, and some train of associated thought, seemed to move Mme. Jenesco more even than she had already been moved.

"You've made me think," she said; then there was a catch in her voice. "You've made me think that the world wasn't so bad—and that I wasn't so bad——"

Without visible transition it was now she who was the comforted, and it was Partridge who was the comforter. She had put her face on his knee, while her shoulders shook; he had put his hand on her head.

"I—I never had a father," she said.

Partridge looked at the calendar. When he spoke his words were a declaration:

"You have now," he said.

CHAPTER LIX

THE SECRET

THEY let this little storm of emotion through which both of them had passed subside into peace. They let this peace take possession of them. For Partridge, at least, the cheap calendar on the wall was become as the sun, and the light of it was on his face.

“ . . . for the end of that man is peace ! ”

For the time being, even New York seemed to slumber. A fitful breeze stirred the scant white curtain, and the curtain went gayly playful. The breeze brought with it a fragrance of grass and locust-bloom. No ; this soiled child had said it. The world wasn't so bad.

“ What is your real name ? ” asked Partridge. “ What is your real Christian name ? — Mary ? Susan ? ”

“ My name is Belle, ” Mme. Jenesco replied.

“ Belle ! ” said Partridge. “ The word for beautiful. It is a beautiful name. You'll be my child, Belle. I—I never thought that I should be so fortunate. I dare say that you will be provided for. There must be some way. ”

Belle took Partridge's hands in hers. She looked up into his face. She studied him with rapt devotion.

The Secret

"You never stole that money," she said slowly.

Partridge closed his lips and his eyes. He let his chin sink on his breast. He meditated. But when he opened his eyes again he was calm and strong.

"We shall trust each other now," he said. "It would have been better had I trusted you all along."

She went into a little panic. The panic misled her.

"Don't you worry," she said. "Even if you did take a little money, that won't make any difference. They shouldn't have kept you working here all these years at a servant's salary."

"Oh, no!" said Partridge gently. "The Tyrones were ever generous. Just shortly before Mr. Nathan Tyrone undertook his last voyage to Europe he told me to increase my salary—to double it, in fact."

"I shouldn't say anything," Belle assented softly, remembering favors received.

"Neither of us should say anything," Partridge pursued. "He was a proud man and a reserved man. He had no more idea of the value of money than a little child would have had. When he was little, his father placed a hundred dollars to his credit in the bank. He drew but one check against this sum. This was a check for the entire amount that he gave to a blind man—a blind man who, it developed, could see."

"No wonder you were tempted!"

"I *was* tempted. You see, Mr. Nathan's father was aware of his son's weakness. And there had been that unfortunate estrangement. They were both proud men. When the elder Tyrone was near death he called me

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to his bedside. He was still bitter against his son. He was bitter against the foreign woman Nathan had taken to be his wife, although the elder Tyrone had never seen her—had always refused to see her. There, I suppose that they have met in heaven, now, and entered into the truce. But it was hard upon me. Yes, I confess that the door was opened to temptation—to pride, to worldliness. Had Nathan ever suspected the facts, that would have been an end of it.”

“You mean that he would have driven you out.”

“It would have driven *him* out.”

“Driven *him* out! Why?”

Partridge hung his head.

“But Mélissine—she loved you,” Mme. Jenesco prompted, softly.

“No more than her father did, perhaps. But I had to keep the secret—keep it all these years. Was it not this that cast its shadow over the house? It was a darkness—a mystery—and I couldn’t explain—couldn’t take it into the courts—could only wait for death. Is it strange that the house came to have a bad name?”

“Tell me what it was,” said Belle.

But now that Partridge was launched on this theme that had kept him silent for years he had to develop it further.

“What could I say? The least hint would have been fatal. Judge Bancroft, a man of the utmost probity as well as learning, had fallen in with my plan long ago. It was simple. I was old. I expected that my own demise would precede that of Mr. Nathan by many years. Even

The Secret

now it would have helped—this night—for to-morrow I have promised to reveal the secret to Mr. Buckhannon.”

“What is the secret?”

“You shall know.”

“But you don’t want to tell?”

He shook his head.

There followed a long silence. Belle studied the old man’s face as an earnest scholar might have studied the white parchment of an ancient manuscript. He did not try to avoid her scrutiny. Neither of them smiled. There was a sadness, and a knowledge of the world, in the face of each of them.

“Did you mean it—just now,” she whispered, “when you said that you would be a father to me?”

“I did—though poor and unworthy——”

“You’re neither,” she said. “You’re one of God’s own noblemen. Listen! You won’t get mad, will you? You said you would be my father. You said that you meant it. You’ve got to let me be a daughter to you. You will, won’t you? Don’t say you won’t. You’re the first person I really ever wanted to do anything for.”

“Why, God bless you!” said Partridge.

“But I’ve got a little money,” Belle hurried on. “It ain’t much. But it’ll be enough for you and me. It don’t matter where I got it. It don’t matter how I got it. Not if I put it to a good use. Tell me that it don’t. I want to be good. I want to be good for the rest of my life. Oh, honest to God, I do!”

She checked a sob. The better to check it she got to

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her feet. She tried to smile. But the things that Partridge was trying to tell her—with his eyes as much as by word of mouth—merely made matters worse.

She had crossed the little room to where the calendar hung. It was mere chance that she rested her head against the calendar. The shadow of her head—dark red, like that of one of Heller's Magdalenes—blotted out the text of the day, but another text gleamed out:

"Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."

CHAPTER LXV

ERE FADES THE ROSE!

PERHAPS something of all this came to Eugene Buckhannon in his sleep. Such things must happen. There must be some system whereby intelligences react on intelligences in ways unguessed and undevised of man—else whence come all the poems of the world, the prophecies, the loves at first sight, the sudden fads, fervors, and contagions?

In any case, Buckhannon arose from a sleep that was sound—and dreamless, so far as he was aware—but knew straightway that he had gained wisdom. “The night brings counsel,” says the Frenchman; which is but another way of saying, “After darkness, dawn!”

So Buckhannon reflected.

Why worry? Why not seize the present good? Why search for gloom when the sun was shining? Why dig up trouble? Wasn’t the world constantly letting the gifts of the gods go to waste through anxiety as to what might be coming next? Useless anxieties! Vain fears! Idiotic glooms!

There was that thing that old Mr. Partridge was going to tell him, for example. What in the devil did it amount to, anyway—so long as Mélissine lived—and

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loved him—him Buckhannon! All this while he was making his toilet with more than the usual care—bath, shave, immaculate silk and linen.

It didn't occur to him, except subconsciously, perhaps; but he believed in the *Lochinvar* type; so had all of his clan—to ride in and carry off the delectable bride and to meditate on the consequences thereof afterward. As good a way as any, to judge by the consequences as manifested by the family thus far. There was happiness as well as beauty in those various old homes of Tennessee known as this or that Buckhannon place.

Buckhannon visualized such a place now—the place that would be all his own some day: big old Colonial house, lofty white pillars, three or four acres of doorway filled with grass and ancient trees, two hundred acres more or less of rich farmland swelling away to meet the acreage of other Buckhannons; then, most of all, Mélissine the mistress of this domain. He saw her garbed in white out under the trees. He saw her presiding over the family table when there should be guests—gallant men and other beautiful women. He saw her at her harp in the old-fashioned parlor—heard her music, strings and voice, as he smoked his cigar in the moonlight out on the porch.

The suite of reveries had brought his enthusiasm to its highest pitch, and himself to Cinnamon Street, at just about the time that Mélissine had finished breakfast. Once more it had been Mélissine who had answered to his knock. She hadn't been expecting him so early, but she had experienced a lurch of hope—hope for what

Ere Fades the Rose!

she couldn't have told. Only, she had been feeling blue. There had been an anxiety upon her not the less disquieting because it was vague.

For, what *was* that thing that Partridge had been keeping to himself? *Why* was he going to impart this secret to Eugene and not to herself? *Was* it a family disgrace? *Was* it something that was going to make her a figure of scorn? What if Eugene *should* go away—and leave her—and never see her again?

She had wrestled with her soul and had come to the decision:

Yet it would be better that she should suffer such a fate, even if it killed her, than that she should bring upon him some disgrace.

All this in Mélissine's head and in her breathless bosom as she sped through the hall to open the door. And something else:

She would not kiss him!

Ah, no! All that was over and done for until Eugene and Grandy had had their talk. She would be reserved. She would hold herself aloof. She would do nothing to embarrass him.

And there, almost before she knew it, Buckhannon had sprung into the hall, had slammed the door back of him. One of his arms was about her waist, one of his hands was back of her head. He had crushed her to him. There was no escape. Oh, she wouldn't have had enough strength to escape anyway even if he had held her with nothing but cobwebs.

"Eugene! Oh, my Eugene!"

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She had just enough strength to pant his name.

But into this cry of hers she was throwing all the hope that this world held for her.

And what was this that he was telling her?

"Get your hat! Get your hat and come along!"

"Where?"

"To City Hall!"

She was so innocent of worldly affairs that she had to ask what for. As a matter of fact, he was almost as breathless as she was and inclined to be incoherent.

"That's where we have to go to get the license," he told her.

"What license?"

"We're going to get married!" he gusted.

They escaped from the house Heaven knows how—Mélissine so excited that she could hardly get her hat on, Buckhannon urging her to come along hat or no hat. Mélissine had flung the message over her shoulder to such as might hear that she would be right back. But Buckhannon would stand for no further delay. Buckhannon was *Lochinvar*.

And it thrilled Mélissine to the very marrow to be ordered about like this. It would have been fine to be dignified and aloof; but this was infinitely finer yet! Her surrender was complete. Who wouldn't have surrendered in the face of such overwhelming force?

But she did become a little frightened once they were down in the License Bureau. Perhaps this was because Buckhannon was a little frightened himself. He tried to conceal this; and then, when he couldn't conceal it,

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to pass it off with a joke to the effect that he had never been here before. But he soon stiffened up. And so did Méliissine.

There were so many people there to look at them! And all these people had to be encouraged.

One would have said that the business of getting married had suddenly become the principal occupation of New York—colored folks down from Harlem, gay with grins and Sunday clothes; Italians, Hunkies, Russian Jews, Armenians, Japanese.

"You can't blame them for looking at us," Buckhannon whispered. "We're the only Americans present."

"But the girls all look as if they felt—just like I do," Méliissine returned, smiling up at him whitely.

"Cheer up," he comforted. "It isn't as bad as it seems."

But Buckhannon's own heart—and his new-found sense of authority—failed him when he and Méliissine arrived in that upper chamber where the actual ceremonies were being performed. Here the couples were lined up two by two—like animal candidates for some new Noah's Ark of Matrimony—while the grinning and tearful relatives looked on and a brace of aldermen went through the formula from "You-Sam-Brown-an'-you-Alice-Jones" on down to "Kiss-your-bride."

Buckhannon could feel Méliissine tremble at his side. It was a tremor that had a response within his own anatomy, from crown to heel, with the center of the disturbance, so to speak, in the pit of his stomach.

His condition became such that he turned to Méliissine

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for consolation. It spoke well for the future of both of them perhaps that it was she who was ready with her consolation now—not only ready with that but with a solution for the thing that was troubling him.

She caught his hand in hers. There was no one looking. She pressed his hand to her breast.

"We'll not get married here," she said. "I know a better way."

CHAPTER LXI

"LET HIM FOREVER, ETC."

IT must have been a test of faith and courage, too, for Mélissine, this proposal of hers. Back there in the old house—which, in a way, was as much a house of mystery for her as it had always been for the other dwellers in Cinnamon Street—was Partridge, with that secret of his, whatever it was. Would Partridge speak now? And when he did speak, was what he would say be something that might still make this Heaven-Selected mate of hers draw back?

To Mélissine it was as if they were married already, she and her Eugene. It hadn't been so while they were awaiting their turn in the License Bureau. It hadn't been so even after the license had been handed over to them. The feeling that they were married had come to her only when he had turned to her, just now, with that look of distress and appeal in his eyes.

She felt almost as if she were a mother to him. Wouldn't she always shield him, though? Wouldn't she fight for him—slave for him—pray for him—yield herself to him heart and soul? But not that, O Lord! Not that! "It would kill me should anything happen now to keep me from giving him my life!"

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Her proposal was this:

The old pastor of the abandoned chapel next door to No. 6 was still alive. For years he had been a pensioner of the Tyrones. It was he who had read the burial service over Mélissine's father, and over her grandfather. Wouldn't it be fine to go and get him to marry them?

Buckhannon thought that it would.

And wouldn't it be fine to get the old gentleman to come to No. 6, so that the wedding could be celebrated there?

Buckhannon was sure of it. He was feeling safer now that he had the license in his pocket.

"And it will be just as if father were there," thrilled Mélissine softly; "and mama, and Grandy, and poor, dear Mme. Jenesco!"

Buckhannon was already beginning to feel as any bridegroom might feel on the eve of a fashionable wedding. The women control such events. But he arose to the occasion.

"And you could put on one of those Vallière dresses," he said; "such as your father loved—and I love."

"Mother's wedding-dress," cried Mélissine.

"And we could put up a lot of flowers—make a floral chapel," Buckhannon proposed, his mind running back to something of that nature that he had seen out home in his childhood. Not that it mattered very much. Not for him. Nothing mattered for him except that they should be married, and that he should make Mélissine

"Let Him Forever, Etc."

happy for the rest of her days. (People in the street looked after them and smiled.)

He was making her happy now. There was hardly a ghost of a cloud left on her horizon, even if there was that much. She had her Eugene to thank for that. And she did thank him from the bottom of her heart to the top of her soul. And her soul soared heavenward.

"I suppose that the time has come to tell you, sir," said Partridge.

This was the first moment that he and Buckhannon had been alone together since Buckhannon returned to the house with Méliissine from the City Hall. There had been much to do. There had been a stress of emotion quite apart from these external activities.

"Tell me nothing," said Buckhannon, clapping an arm about Partridge's shoulders.

"It has to do with certain financial arrangements, sir," said Partridge. "You may know that I have been entrusted for a number of years with the stewardship of the Tyrone fortune."

"Listen!" Buckhannon commanded.

He and Partridge were in the drawing-room. All the doors were open. There came a froth of music, a clash of feminine voices, then music again. That was Mélesine making her first attempt at the "Wedding March" from "Lohengrin." The wedding was to be celebrated in the music-room where all the Tyrones could bear witness. In there they had constructed the floral arch—

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pink roses, chiefly, from the climbing vines at the side of the house. It seemed as if the music and the voices constituted a breeze, and as if this breeze blew into the drawing-room now, bringing the fragrance of the flowers along.

But presently these sounds ceased, and Partridge was for speaking again.

"I feel that it is my duty," he began.

"Tell me this," Buckhannon interrupted. "Is is something that concerns Méliissine?"

"It is, sir."

"Does she know anything about it?"

"No, sir. It was something that I never even communicated to her father."

"I see. It's some secret that you have been keeping to yourself all these years."

"It was because——"

"Never mind! Don't tell me anything unless I ask," Buckhannon ordered with friendly authority. "And would it disturb Méliissine's happiness if she knew anything about it?"

Partridge nodded an affirmation that was a signal of distress.

"Well, then," said Buckhannon, "why, for the love of Mike, do you want to say anything at all for? You're devoted to her, aren't you—you're her Grandy, aren't you—you want to see her happy for all the rest of her days, don't you?"

"Heaven grant it!"

"Shake hands," said Buckhannon. They shook. But

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Buckhannon could see that Partridge was still far from being convinced that all was well.

It was with the purpose of further persuading him that Buckhannon said:

"Whatever it is, keep it dark until after the wedding. I had a grandfather once who used to say that secrets and mystery and things like that were all that kept folks from committing suicide. It makes life like a story. We go on reading, or living, just to see how it's going to end."

And that was all of what Partridge might have had to say. It was, until later in the day, when the old preacher arrived—he who had been a pensioner of the Tyrones for so many years—and Mélissine, tremulous, was dressed in the bridal gown that had been her mother's; all this, and so on down through the ceremony to that part of it where the old preacher said that if there was any one who had something to say why the marriage should not take place, let him say it now or forever afterward hold his peace——

The preacher was very old. He had lost his place. Perhaps there, for a moment or so, he had even forgotten what he was quite about. Was this a marriage or a funeral—a christening or an examination of candidates for admission to the church?

There was a silence.

Under the floral arch that had been constructed where Nathan Tyrone had lain, Mélissine and Eugene were kneeling side by side. His head was down—like the head

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of a young knight about to be accepted into the companionship; but MéliSSine's face was uplifted, seraphic. So might her mother have looked twenty years ago—the blond curls, the same tender curves that made a profile of strength and grace, and that expression in her eyes that most brides have—the look of him who stood on a peak in Darien and saw the Pacific—that other ocean of mystery and enchanted islands.

Just back of them the two living witnesses—old Partridge, very white, appareled in his best, and then, the Woman in Black.

Partridge was so moved that every now and then a little click came into his throat that was almost audible. His face was the face of age, long-suffering and holy, the physical part of it burned away, nothing left but the transparent spirit, so that to look at him made you imagine that he was there merely as the envoy of some foreign court, and that once the ceremony was over he would soon be gone.

But was Partridge going to speak? He knew everything. Was there something he had to say why this marriage should not be?

Again, there was Mme. Jenesco—still the Woman in Black, but no longer the Woman of Babylon. Steadily, steadily, at fixed intervals—like the flow of certain geysers—two tears overflowed from those well-deep eyes of hers.

Wasn't she going to have something to say? She also was deeply versed in the accumulated wisdom of the world. Was she going to say the preventive words?

"Let Him Forever, Etc."

"Stop! Marriage is a fraud! Run wild, my sisters! Look at me! What is purity—old-fashioned goodness—mothers—and grandmothers! Behold this bride! Corrupt her—send her to the streets—the brothel—the jail—the hospital—and the morgue—else she nourish children who will be clean and strong, teach them love and reverence, make men and women of them to serve the State.

But Mme. Jenesco merely touched her tears away at intervals.

Then Partridge spoke—just a whisper, though, and a single word. "Belle," he said. And he passed Mme. Jenesco's arm under his own.

And as if this were the signal he had been waiting for—or the inspiration—the preacher spoke the concluding words.

"Amen! Amen!"

And several of the pink roses let their petals fall—like a blessing—with perfect generosity—giving all they had.

CHAPTER LXII

THE INEVITABLE HOUR

PARTRIDGE had given some sort of an indecisive rendezvous to Buckhannon; or was it Buckhannon who lacked decision? Wasn't it just possible that Buckhannon himself had come to fear any revelation that the old butler might make as much as Partridge himself dreaded it?

Partridge came into the music room of No. 6—there where Nathan Tyrone had lain in state, where Mélissine herself had in some way been translated, and where the portrait of that earlier Mélissine smiled down—at death and marriage as if, after all, these both were happy incidents. Partridge lit the candles at the side of the portrait. He raised his eyes to it. Here was the symbol of his earthly faith.

"Hello!"—and there was Buckhannon.

"Why," said Partridge; "I wasn't expecting you so soon."

"Mélissine's asleep," said Buckhannon, guardedly. "I thought that we two——"

He put his arm about the old man's shoulders, pressed him into a chair, himself drew another chair closer. Partridge accepted the chair like one who is very tired,

The Inevitable Hour.

had gone a long race, had done all he could, and was ready to forego further effort. He leaned back. His white face was up.

"I have no right to keep the truth from you longer," the old man said. "I've tried to do my duty. If I have erred, God—and, I believe, you, sir—will understand."

"Trust me," said Buckhannon, with fervor.

"I couldn't tell before," said Partridge; "it would have brought such shame on Mr. Tyrone, likewise on Mélissine."

"Trust me," said Buckhannon again; but now he was not quite so cocksure. He was very alert.

"May I ask, sir," Partridge asked, "if you are a man of means?"

"My family is considered rich," said Buckhannon. "I inherited something from my grandmother—plenty to live on. But I could raise a pretty big amount. You bet I could, old man. How much do you need?"

"Oh, it wasn't that, sir; only, it does simplify the matter."

"How so?"

"After my death, Mélis—Mrs. Buckhannon, sir——"

"She'll always be Mélissine for you!"

"——will inherit—everything. But until then——"

"After your death?"

"After my death," whispered Partridge. "Oh, sir, there have been times when I would gladly have passed over, as they say. It would so have simplified matters!"

"What? How?"

"The elder Mr. Tyrone, Nathan's father, saw to that.

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He employed Judge Bancroft who, as you doubtless know, was a very able man. Both of them seemed to foresee—and forestall—any possible weakness on my part. I was bound hand and foot. There was no escape. And yet, can't you see how it was? Had the slightest breath of suspicion reached them it would have been shipwreck, of their lives, not to mention my own."

"You mean, that there was something about the woman—or girl—that Mr. Nathan Tyrone, Méliissine's father, brought here to the house?"

"That was it. That was the beginning of it all. That was thirty years ago. That was the cause of the estrangement between Mr. Nathan and his father. They were both proud men—sensitive, as unyielding—as unyielding as General Grant, sir—and yet as gentle, as gentle—as gentle as the lady that Mr. Nathan brought back with him from Paris, Méliissine's mother. And, naturally, when the elder Mr. Tyrone refused to see her, why, Mr. Nathan, who had been willing to make peace, again rebelled."

"But after the elder Mr. Tyrone died?"

"That was when my trouble—if I may so speak of it—became acute," said Partridge. "Not immediately! Mr. Nathan was then in Paris. He was greatly pre-occupied by the health of Mme. Tyrone. Later, when she died, leaving Méliissine, I was forced to tell him my first lie. After that, my life became a lie."

"Impossible! You were always so devoted."

"I lied to him. I lied to Méliissine."

Buckhannon heard a half-stifled breath at the door.

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He turned. There was a white shadow there in the candlelight. It was Méliissine herself. Evidently, she had awaked and, not finding Buckhannon, had come to look for him. She had heard that last declaration of Partridge, had started forward. But Buckhannon stopped her with a gesture. Partridge was oblivious of everything except his own thought.

"Lied to her! I don't believe it. That is, I don't believe it was a bad lie."

"Not a bad lie, I hope. No, it was meant to save them pain. It has lasted now for almost twenty years."

Buckhannon thought. He had an eye and an ear for Méliissine. It was almost as if she were standing in front of him and speaking to him, he was that much aware of all she felt.

"Get it off your mind," he said. "Méliissine loves you——" He would have liked to add that it wasn't otherwise with himself. He brought the sentiment out in another way. "You're a sort of a father to us both," he said. "We have a right to share your trouble. Do you suppose that anything you could tell us now—or anything that you may have done in the past—would change our feeling for you?"

This made Partridge weep, silently, with fine repression.

Buckhannon now reached out back of him and found a hold on Méliissine's fingers, for Méliissine had come creeping close, eager to sympathize and console.

"Or do you think," Buckhannon pursued, "that any-

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thing—*anything!*—could make me less proud of having married MéliSSine, or make me love her less?”

“It was for her sake,” said Partridge.

“I believe you.”

“And her father’s.”

“Tell me what it was.”

Partridge let himself go in silent prayer. It was so still in Cinnamon Street that the organ-notes of the city tided in, softly—a *De Profundis* for all the martyrs otherwise unsung. What was coming? What would it be, the cry of this old man? And what would their cry be—the two who waited?

“They were disinherited,” Partridge whispered.

“Disinherited! Is that all?”

“All! *All!*”

“Why, that’s happened a thousand times.”

“Not like this. Suppose that Mr. Nathan—or MéliSSine—had known that they were living in a house not legally their own—spending money that was not legally their own!”

“Whose was it?”

“*Theirs*, in the sight of God.”

“But in fact?—in the eyes of the law?”

“Mine!”

“Yours! And you never told?”

“I lied about it. I told Mr. Nathan that his father had died without making a will—that I would arrange all the details with Judge Bancroft. There was no legal recourse.”

“And it was that——”

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"That, for the past twenty years—when Mr. Nathan required funds to buy this blessed picture, when he generously doubled my salary. Oh, it was an answer to my prayers that he would never occupy himself with worldly details. If the matter had ever come into the courts—if a question had ever arisen as to my right to draw on the family funds——"

Mélistine gave an audible little gasp. She had been standing there wavering.

"Grandy!"

She came around and put her arms about Partridge's head. She kneeled in front of him.

"My darling Grandy!"

"Eh! Eh!" went Partridge.

And he sank a little lower in his chair, gazing at Mélistine as long as he could, so that he could read the look in her face, before his eyes should fill again.

CHAPTER LXIII

THEY VANISH

I AM sure that it was that way with him always," said Méliissine.

This was years afterward. Méliissine was the matron now. She was mature. But she was more beautiful than ever. She would keep on getting more beautiful than ever—as is the way with women of heart and understanding.

"I am sure that when the dear Lord spoke to Partridge there was nothing that He could have said that would have pleased Partridge better than: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant!'"

A lovely look of tender recollection had come into Méliissine's face. Buckhannon pressed her hand. They had driven down from their up-town place for a look at Cinnamon Street. But Cinnamon Street was changed. Gone was Tony Zamboni's; gone the druggist; gone the chapel and the churchyard; gone old No. 6! There were warehouses there, and a new garage. It must have been a spirit-picture that brought that look into Méliissine's face.

"He was the perfect gentleman," said Méliissine fondly.

"He was all of that," Buckhannon agreed. "I'm glad

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that he lived to influence Mme. Jenesco, permanently, as he influenced us. Where is she now?"

"Still running the day-nursery, and happy! I saw her only yesterday."

They relapsed into silence for a while.

They were still standing there—they had left their car around the corner in the granite-paved avenue—when two very old men came hobbling down the street, side by side. Both of these old men were shrunken, but one had been large and the other had been small. He who had been large had a bony shaven face out of which stared a pair of fixed and owlish eyes. He who had been small—and was now smaller yet—had a furtive look about him. He had a scraggly gray beard on his chin, but for all that he looked like a decrepit old rat—"a rat that had seen a cat."

"I beg your pardon," said Buckhannon, saluting them.

"Eh?" said the rat.

The rat's companion merely stared.

"We were looking for Cinnamon Street," said Buckhannon.

"Eugene!" Méliissine chided him softly.

But Buckhannon took her arm under his.

"We were looking for Cinnamon Street," he said; "No. 6 Cinnamon Street."

"That's the garage over yonder," said he of the bony face.

"There must have been some mistake," said Buckhannon. "This No. 6 was a fine old house—a beautiful old house—in which some beautiful people lived."

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The human rat now began to giggle. He stamped the sidewalk with his cane. The other didn't smile. He merely stared. It was he who spoke.

"You mean the old No. 6," said he.

"It must have been," said Buckhannon.

"It couldn't have been," said the Owl, "because the house I mean wasn't beautiful. Neither was the people who lived in it."

"Are you sure?"

"For upward of thirty years I was the policeman on this beat," said he who had now revealed himself to be Hickcock. "It was a house with a bad name—such a hen-coop as even New York might be leary about!"

"But why did it have a bad name?" asked Buckhannon.

"Ask my friend here," Hickcock said dispassionately. "He ought to know. He kept the drug-store here right across from it."

The druggist, thus appealed to, stopped giggling and became cautious. He glanced about as if afraid of eavesdroppers.

"They say it was haunted," he confided.

"Haunted?"

"Some queer things take place in a city like this," said Hickcock, with the air of one who means more than his words imply.

"That's right," the druggist giggled.

Hickcock turned his owlish eyes on the druggist, brought them back to Buckhannon. Hickcock soberly pointed a finger at his head, meaning that the druggist was not quite responsible, then said:

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"I once had a friend who said that old men and old houses are all haunted. I don't know what he meant. But I know that he spoke the truth. He was that kind—except when he was sober."

"Thank you," said Buckhannon, meaning that the interview was closed. And the two old cronies continued their way. "There goes the world in general," said Buckhannon, pressing the tender arm that was under his own.

"Just ignorance," Mélissine forgave them, with a tearful little laugh.

"Just ignorance," Buckhannon agreed; "and the lack of charity that ignorance breeds. Houses and hearts—we've got to know what goes on inside of them before we can judge."

Mélissine returned the pressure of his arm.

There for a fleeting moment, it was as if all that had vanished had returned again—old No. 6, of the green blinds and the Colonial door; the smithy to one side, with its ailanthus-tree; and the churchyard on the other, with its abandoned chapel and its flowering locusts. A stillness gathered in the street. Once more the air was perfumed. Then, down the stoop of No. 6—the spectral presence of it—there came—for Buckhannon, at least—the nimble old servant who was Partridge, followed by the stately Nathan Tyrone and his fair, old-fashioned daughter.

Mélissine sighed. She had followed his thought.

"They vanish," said Buckhannon.

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"But we love them still," said Mélissine, "and shall love them always."

They turned and slowly walked away, themselves thus vanishing from Cinnamon Street forever.

THE END



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